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# "Starting from Below Zero": Iraqi Refugee Resettlement and Integration in the United States and Austin, Texas

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# "Starting from Below Zero": Iraqi Refugee Resettlement and Integration in the United States and Austin, Texas

**by**

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# Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, Dr. Richard Ulack (1942-2011), for teaching me what geography and fatherhood are all about.

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# "Starting from Below Zero": Iraqi Refugee Resettlement and Integration in the United States and Austin, Texas

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This dissertation explores the resettlement and integration of Iraqi refugees coming to the United States, and particularly to Austin, TX, from 2008-2012. On a broad level, it seeks to understand how peoples, organizations, and government actors combine to negotiate the controversial practice of third-country refugee resettlement. Data is drawn from 16 months of participant observation at a local refugee resettlement agency in Austin with Iraqi refugees and from one-on-one interviews with many of those refugees and with local agency service providers. The research seeks to explore what (and how) federal, state, and local policies shape the everyday resettlement and integration experiences of Iraqi refugees in Austin. In addition to policy and other structural obstacles in place in the current American resettlement paradigm, the dissertation also seeks to understand aspects of agency utilized by Iraqi refugees and how, if at all, cultural, social, and political factors contextualize and impact their experiences upon arrival to the United States and throughout their first few months in this

country. The study finds that Iraqi refugees are highly impacted both by political and social structural issues already in place within the receiving society but also by cultural and social factors and frameworks which they "bring with them" from Iraq. The study also illustrates that the current literature on refugees underemphasizes refugees' voices. These voices depict the experience of resettlement and integration in the United States as one where many feel a sense of being caught "between here and there" and constantly trying to "catch up with life" but without enough help, support, or guidance. The voices underscore the human experience and struggle of forced migration generally and specifically that of third country resettlement of Iraqi refugees to the United States.

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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This dissertation tells a story about refugees. The story itself is a very particular one about a specific group of refugees that came to the US between 2006-2012: Iraqi refugees displaced by the American-led invasion of Iraq beginning in 2003. Although this story deals with a particular (albeit extremely diverse) group of people and has its own complicated and complex context and history, it contributes to broader and important discourses going on within the fields of migration and refugee studies. This "field", however, is not limited simply to those studying refugee issues within academia. These discourses span academia, the media (print and online), the blogosphere and other outlets available in the public sphere. These discourses, in the broadest terms, are the ongoing debates over immigration in the US and the sticky and controversial matter of relations between the "West" and the Arab-Islamic world. Iraqi refugee resettlement to the US overlaps with these two debates in various ways and has the ability to offer insights on these important, if not divisive, issues. This dissertation strives to use the story of Iraqi refugees in the US to make contributions to the ongoing dialogue.

At the outset, this research topic is influenced by the desire to understand how peoples, organizations, and governments negotiate the controversial practice of third-country refugee resettlement[1]. International humanitarian responses to human

[1] It should be noted here that the term refugee is used in this work not in a general sense but referring to those who have been legally designated as refugees under the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and the following 1967 protocols: "a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership

displacement have been formed and reformed over the past six decades. Third-country refugee resettlement is a specific humanitarian strategy developed for protecting displaced peoples when they can neither return to their home country nor be safely or successfully integrated within the country to which they initially fled. While this and other strategies have been designed by various institutions, agencies, and governments to help relieve people fleeing from violence and discrimination around the world, we continue to witness a controversial and discriminatory politics of exclusion and control concerning third-country refugee resettlement. Moreover, refugee movement, and forced displacement generally, play a specific and important role in the broader contemporary debates about (im)migration. The American-led 2003 invasion of Iraq and the subsequent Iraqi refugee crisis highlight many of these controversial issues. It is these issues which I wish to discuss in greater detail in this dissertation.

### 1.1 Significance and Objectives of the Study

The 2003 American-led war in Iraq and the resulting ethno-sectarian violence which grew out of that conflict caused one of the largest movements of refugees in the Middle East since the Palestinian refugee migrations in 1948. The United Nations estimates that the number of displaced Iraqis from this conflict, at its height, was around

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of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country" (http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c125.html). Although the term refugee and the legal definition of who can be a refugee is heavily contested, all attempts will be made in this dissertation to differentiate between legally designated refugees and those who are displaced but not considered refugees.

4 million, with over half of those internally displaced within Iraq. These numbers are based off of estimates provided by the governments of Iraq and those receiving countries of Iraqi refugees such as Syria, Jordan, and Egypt and have thus come under much scrutiny[2]. As close to half of displaced Iraqis are seeking refuge in countries bordering Iraq, namely Syria and Jordan, this exodus of people has had a destabilizing effect on the region economically and socially. Moreover, Iraqis living in exile in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and other countries throughout the region are often doing so with few, if any, rights, benefits, or protection. Moreover, since the advent of the Arab Spring, many Iraqis have found themselves in equally dangerous situations in countries such as Syria and are faced with a difficult decision (that is to say, if a choice is even available) to stay or return to a possibly worse situation in Iraq. The bleak situation for displaced Iraqis inside and outside of Iraq has compelled international humanitarian organizations and some countries to coordinate their efforts to resettle Iraqi refugees elsewhere: primarily the United States and a small number of European countries such as Sweden and Germany. Having resettled over 85,000 Iraqi refugees since 2005, the United States has become the main receiving country of this refugee population. While third-country refugee resettlement in the United States and Europe is offered to some as a viable alternative to languishing without rights or opportunities in countries throughout the Arab World, making the transition to life in the US has proven to be challenging at best.

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[2] Issues regarding the numbers of Iraqi refugees will be covered in more detail in chapter 4.

This dissertation project examines the geopolitics of refugee response policies, processes and resettlement in the United States through the lens of the Iraqi Refugee Crisis which began in earnest in 2005. It looks in brief at Iraqi refugee migration within the Middle East, especially between Iraq and Syria, by looking at the policies of displacement in receiving countries as well as how the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) has attempted to solve its loss of human capital as well as the ongoing problem of internal displacement within the country. The dissertation research strives more specifically, however, not only to document and understand the process and experience of third country refugee resettlement and integration among Iraqi refugees in the U.S. and particularly Austin, TX, but on a broader level to enter into the dialogue and debate over refugee migration to the U.S. and more particularly about the specific discourses surrounding Arab refugee migration to the U.S. To do this, the research explores Iraqi refugee integration in the United States through an analysis of the personal experiences of Iraqi refugees, and through examination of the policies and projects of a refugee resettlement agency in Austin, TX. Specifically, the research was guided by the following questions:

- What federal, state, and local policies shape refugee resettlement and integration in the United States?
- How does the system of using voluntary agencies (volags) and local resettlement agencies work and is it an adequate system for resettlement and integration for Iraqi refugees, in particular?
- How, if at all, does the political/social/cultural context of Iraq affect Iraqis resettlement experience in the US?
- How does place affect Iraqi refugee integration and identity?
- How do aspects of the current political atmosphere in the US (i.e. anti-immigration, anti-Arab, anti-Muslim, Iraq War since 2003) affect the

resettlement and integration experiences of refugees broadly, and specifically Iraqi refugees? How do they negotiate these issues, if at all, in their daily lives?

- What are the feelings of Iraqi refugees and local resettlement agency service providers towards the US and towards the US refugee resettlement system?
- How do Iraqis negotiate identity after arriving and living in the United States? How are their sectarian and/or ethnic identities maintained or dispensed with once in the US? How do Iraqi refugees identify themselves here in the US? How might sectarian and/or ethnic identity affect their integration to the US?

The decision to conduct research with Iraqi refugees, as opposed to one of the other various refugee populations arriving to the United States, was made due to the unique characteristics of Iraqi displacement within the region of the Middle East and also in regards to the resettlement of Iraqis to the US. Additionally, the Iraqi refugee crisis was chosen due to my own interests and background. This project as a whole and the specific research questions it seeks to answer have been in part formed over the past 8 years in which I have been volunteering and/or working with refugee populations and studying the region of the Middle East. From 2003-2005, I volunteered with refugees from all over the world as an English teacher and community advocate in Lexington, KY. From the outset, I was interested in the way that refugees arrived to a place such as Lexington and then how they integrated into their new surroundings. Oftentimes sent to a place with few or no friends or relatives, refugees are forced to start anew with few resources. Then in 2008 after receiving my M.A. in Middle Eastern Studies from the University of Texas at Austin I began volunteering with the first of two refugee resettlement agencies in Austin, Caritas. As a community advocate volunteer at Caritas I was assigned to work closely with a single Iraqi family to help them navigate their first

few months in the U.S. This opportunity provided the chance to observe firsthand the process of Iraqi refugee resettlement in Austin. While the resettlement of this particular family was challenging to say the least, it was not until I began working (as part of my research) at the second refugee agency, Refugee Services of Texas (RST) in 2009 that I was able to observe how varied the experiences of resettlement/integration were from individual to individual and from family to family. Working first as the Employment Specialist for Middle East Refugee populations and then as the Employment Program Supervisor and, finally, as the Resettlement Program Supervisor, I was able to gain firsthand knowledge about the policies and practices of refugee resettlement in the US as well as work one-on-one with refugee families and individuals from all over the world, particularly Iraq. Through these combined experiences, I was able to get a deeper understanding of the macro and micro-level policies, *and problems*, of international refugee response and management and additionally, get a sense of the challenges, hardships, and adversity that refugees face upon arrival to the US.

While refugees suffer and endure hardships all over the world and in increasing numbers, the Iraqi Refugee Crisis presented issues that made it unique in many ways from other refugee situations. First and foremost, the large scale displacement in Iraq was caused by a high profile, controversial war begun by the United States, the country that would then, after much debate, resettle tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens. One example of America's role in making this a unique refugee situation was its design of a program developed to aid Iraqis inside of Iraq who had worked/translated for the

American forces, the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) Program. Secondly, the geopolitical context into which Iraqi refugees are resettling in the West can serve to further their sense of discrimination and disadvantage. The arrival of Iraqi refugees to Europe and the US has come at a time of increased hostility towards immigration in the West and in an era of escalating mistrust of Arab/Islamic society and culture. Third, the Iraqi Refugee Crisis is the largest displacement event in the Middle East in decades (rivaled now by the crisis in Syria) and provides an important glimpse into possible future (noting here the state violence and subsequent human displacement in recent examples of uprisings in Libya, Syria, and Yemen) refugee movement and migration policy in the Middle East. Finally, Iraqi refugees expose some of the worst aspects of the refugee experience; the damaging cost of war, the consequences of severe discrimination and sectarian strife, the difficulties of living in an urban setting of a border country such as Syria (as opposed to a refugee camp) with no rights and few, if any, benefits or aid, and the final step of moving to a third country (such as the US) where one may know nothing of the culture, language, economy, or society, all while dealing with the events and anguishes of the past.

While third country refugee resettlement is viewed as a humanitarian enterprise, refugee populations often face severe stress and anxiety in their new home, along with various other hardships and challenges that come with resettling in a new country. Local resettlement agencies which are located around the country to help refugees make the transition and ultimately gain self-sufficiency, despite their effort, hard work, and good intentions, are frequently underfunded and understaffed, often increasing the difficulties

for disadvantaged refugee populations. Despite these challenges, refugee populations are an integral and growing segment in US cities such as Austin, TX. Refugee populations affect and are impacted by entities such as local schools, public transportation, the local economy, housing laws, and medical services. Despite growing refugee populations and the challenges they face, refugee resettlement remains an issue that many people know very little about. In many instances, refugees are nearly invisible populations within the communities to which they are resettling.

To better highlight the experiences that many refugees face after arriving in the US, I want to recount bits of my experience with one of the families with whom I worked at RST. Providing a specific example will more fully elaborate the struggles many refugees face. It should be noted, however, that the experience of this particular family is not, of course, necessarily representative of all refugee integration experiences in the US. While many other Iraqi refugees and refugees of other nationalities and ethnic groups do certainly share similarities to this family's experience, it is important to call attention to refugees' varied and diverse encounters with resettlement and integration.

One of the families with whom I worked at RST consisted of 5 members: a mother and father in their late 50's/early 60's, a son in his early 20's, an 18 year old daughter, and another son age 6. While the family is from Baghdad and the children were all born in Iraq, they are considered Palestinian as both the parents were born in Palestine and migrated as children to Iraq. Palestinian migrants in Iraq were given special treatment by Saddam Hussein for a number of reasons but after the fall of the

Hussein regime in 2003, the Palestinian community was one of the first groups to be targeted by insurgent groups in Iraq. Many Palestinians in Iraq were killed in the early years of the war and those who escaped were not allowed into Syria or Jordan (as were other Iraqi refugees) due to their lack of documentation (such as passports). Iraq has no path to citizenship for migrants such as those from Palestine; neither for the immigrant parents, nor for the children who were born in Iraq. Without official documentation showing any type of nationality, Palestinians who were able to escape the violence in Iraq were put into makeshift UN refugee camps in "no man's land" along the Syrian-Iraqi borderlands. These camps in the middle of the desert were without electricity, running water, or regular supplies of food. The severe conditions of the camps were well documented on the United Nations website as that organization searched for host countries willing to resettle this "nation-less" refugee population. Not until 2009 did the US agree to begin resettling Palestinian Iraqis from one of the camps along the border.

When this family arrived in Austin, I went with a volunteer to pick them up at the airport and bring them to their apartment which had been furnished by a group of volunteers. Having lived in one of the camps along the Syria-Iraq border for more than two years, this family came with very few resources or belongings, financial or material. None of the members of the family knew any English. None had finished high school and only the father had previous work experience, at a book store. Additionally, the father had a number of health concerns including diabetes and vision impairment. The mother of the family had health concerns as well but they were psychological as opposed

to physical. The family had been through a number of traumatic experiences in Iraq which most likely added to the already high levels of emotional stress and anxiety they were experiencing due to moving to a new home. The family had no relatives in Austin although there was another family in town whom they knew from the camp.

Upon arrival, the six year old son was enrolled in Austin Independent School District in the first grade. The 18 year old daughter chose not to enroll in high school as her previous level of education was too low. The eldest son was able to enroll in the nearest Job Corps Center in San Marcos, TX a few months after arriving, a good opportunity for him, but it meant the family was without its main potential money earner. Due to cultural considerations, the family has deemed it inappropriate for the 18 year old daughter to work on her own in the city and thus she continues to stay at home. The parents have not been able to find work due to their lack of English, their age, and health concerns. Having been in Austin now for over a year, all financial aid through the local resettlement agency is exhausted (these benefits last for a maximum of eight months, often less). The family is now living month to month with the help of local mosque and church groups who will soon cut off funding as well. Additionally, they are not eligible to receive any type of benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA) due to their age (under 65) and as the SSA did not regard their health issues as warranting benefits on those grounds. Moreover, multiple members of the family continue to experience feelings of depression and isolation no doubt due to the combination of past and present events.

Taking the experience of this family into consideration, one begins to get a sense of the various types of stress and adversity a refugee may face after arriving to a new country. The "normal" emotional and psychological hardships of starting anew in a different country such as depression, isolation, and culture shock are compounded, however, by other outside factors such as the economic crisis that the US is presently experiencing, specific state and federal policies concerning refugee resettlement, and understaffed/underfunded local non-profit resettlement agencies. Finally, the forced migration of Iraqi refugees has come at an important and specific geopolitical moment. It has come at a time of increased hostility towards immigration in the "West" and in an era of escalating mistrust of Arab and Islamic society and culture. With these issues in mind, how is resettlement and integration negotiated by the different stakeholders who are active in resettling Iraqi refugees to the United States and, of course, by the refugees themselves? Moreover, how might this issue be addressed in the social sciences and specifically within the field of geography? These questions will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

### 1.2 Data and Methods

The primary methodologies utilized for this study were participant observation and one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Participant observation, carried out from June 2009-September 2010, was conducted while working at Refugee Services of Texas (RST) in a variety of different positions (Employment Specialist for Middle East Refugee

populations, Employment Program Supervisor, and Resettlement Program Supervisor). By working at RST, I was able to gain an "insiders" knowledge of the various policies, practices, and processes of refugee resettlement in the United States. Not only was I able to observe the daily procedures at RST, but I was also able to work closely with refugees from all over the world. In this capacity I observed how refugees were affected by the various policies and processes of refugee resettlement. Furthermore, I formed close relationships with many of the refugees who arrived throughout 2009-2010, many of them Iraqi. These relationships allowed me to have a sizeable number of Iraqi refugees (whom I knew well) to interview about their individual experiences with resettlement in the US.

Working at Refugee Services of Texas as part of my research happened largely by chance. As I was preparing to begin my research and was building relationships with Caritas of Austin and other resettlement agencies around the nation (many of which were in Detroit) a friend sent me a job posting for Employment Specialist for Middle East populations at RST. It seemed like an interesting opportunity so I applied, was called in for an interview and was offered the position. The agency director was fully aware of my current status as a doctoral student, the topic of my dissertation, and that I would eventually have to return to being a full-time student. Agreeing that I would stay at least a full year at RST, I took the position and started in June 2009. In the end, I worked at RST for 16 months and it was one of the most intense, challenging, and rewarding experiences of my life.

As the Employment Specialist for Middle Eastern populations I was tasked to work with refugees almost solely from Iraq but also from Iran, Afghanistan, and Somalia (populations from those countries were designated "Middle Eastern" by the agency). My primary job responsibilities as worded in the job description were, "As Employment Specialist, you would have your own caseload composed primarily of Iraqi clients, with the possibly of other Arabic speaking Iranians, Somali, and others, as needed. You would be conducting intakes to gather their background education and work experience, conducting job readiness classes in Arabic, networking with employers, and taking the clients on job interviews, as needed. Plus documenting it all, naturally." While there were various duties in this position, the primary characteristic by which an Employment Specialist is judged (beyond organizational skills, ability to handle large case loads, language skills, etc.) is by his/her ability to find full-time employment for their clients. This, however, is also the most difficult thing to do, especially in a failing economy but also for other reasons which will be explained in more detail in following chapters.

For about one month I worked in this capacity until the agency decided to restructure the positions and the various programs in the office. For example, instead of three Employment Specialists in the Employment Program who all worked under the direction of the area director, an Employment Program Supervisor would be named who would work under the director and the remaining two employment specialists would then be under the direction and guidance of the Employment Program Supervisor. I applied for and was promoted to Employment Program Supervisor at this time. In this position I

continued to work closely with many Iraqi refugees but also had more interaction with some of the other primary arrival groups such as Burmese and Nepalese refugees. Additionally, I was tasked as the Employment Program Supervisor to oversee the program. Some of the main duties of this position included: ensuring compliance with all contracts and agreements between RST and some of the main government-sponsored funding programs such as the Matching Grant Program (MG) and the Refugee Cash Assistance Program (RCA); making sure the other Employment Specialists were following the contract guidelines and properly documenting their interactions with their clients; attending national and state meetings; preparing reports for state quarterly refugee meetings; networking and building new relationships with businesses in the local Austin community. I held this position until October 2009 when I then applied for and was promoted to the Resettlement Program Supervisor.

I spent the remainder of my time at RST (until September 2010) in this position. As Resettlement Program Supervisor I carried out some of the same supervisory responsibilities as the Employment Program Supervisor (ensuring compliance with all contracts, attending national and state meetings, ensuring that caseworkers are documenting daily interactions, etc.) but the position also included new responsibilities that come with managing an entirely different program. The main tasks of the Resettlement Program (as opposed to finding jobs for clients and preparing them for employment in the US) is to provide refugee clients with the necessary "core services" that they are entitled to in their first 90 days after arrival. Core services include: picking

newly arriving refugees up at the airport; finding, leasing, and furnishing an apartment for an individual or a family and transporting them from the airport to the apartment; applying for food stamps, Medicaid, and social security card for all new clients; enrolling each client to a specific temporary government-sponsored funding program such as MG or RCA; providing cultural orientation to all newly arrived clients; and organizing and transporting clients to all medical appointments. This list only partially covers the myriad of core services which are required for each new refugee and during a period of high-volume arrivals, ensuring that all core services are conducted properly and efficiently *and* that everything is documented can be challenging with a limited number of staff. As the Resettlement Program Supervisor then, my main duty was not only to help with these services but also to ensure that they were conducted in compliance with RST's contracts with the United States Refugee Program (USRP) as well as similar contracts with the state of Texas.

During the time I was working with Refugee Services of Texas, I kept a regular journal noting my experiences and interactions at RST. Entries from this journal were transcribed and coded for reoccurring themes. Topics such as policy, community, self-sufficiency, employment, language, and cultural orientation, just to name a few, were themes I regularly engaged with while at RST. Journal entries are used as a primary data source throughout this dissertation and are cited by the date of the entry and will give context where necessary and/or useful.

One-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted during the spring 2011 academic semester. Respondents were identified largely through the development of relationships formed while working at RST. Snowball sampling was also utilized however, as a small number of the interviews conducted were with respondents who had been identified by either other refugees or by agency directors who had previously spoken with refugee clients about the research. I carried out approximately 24 interviews with Iraqi refugees and refugee service providers in Austin, TX. 20 of the interviews were with Iraqi refugees while the remaining four interviews were conducted with directors and/or staff of various refugee organizations in Austin, TX. The four organizations represented in these interviews were Refugee Services of Texas (refugee resettlement agency), CARITAS of Austin (refugee resettlement agency), Multicultural Refugee Coalition (a non-profit working to support and empower refugees throughout the resettlement process), and finally Interfaith Action of Central Texas (iACT for Refugee Program coordinates all English as a Second Language instruction for refugees arriving in Austin, TX). The Iraqis interviewed for this study were refugees who arrived in Austin, TX as refugees from the current war in Iraq. Iraqis who had been here less than one year were not interviewed. The participants had to be between the ages of 18 and 65. The reason for this age range was that I wanted to interview refugees who were work eligible as the challenges of finding employment is a major theme for all refugees in achieving self-sufficiency. Only two of the 23 respondents were female due to cultural concerns among the population being interviewed. All respondents were fluent in Arabic

while some were also fluent in English. If the respondent was fluent in English and comfortable speaking that language then the interview was conducted in English. If the respondent spoke only a minimal level of English or none at all, then the interview was conducted in Arabic by either me or a translator who was familiar with certain dialects of Iraqi Arabic which I am not proficient in. An informed consent document was provided to each respondent in Arabic and/or English, depending on the respondent's proficiency in the English language.

All interviews, whether with refugees or organization directors, were in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Refugees, in particular were first asked to talk about their lives in Iraq (where they were from, education, professions, etc.), and then about their flight from Iraq, if they did indeed cross a border. They were asked about the situation under which they were forced to leave Iraq and about the process of applying for and being granted refugee status. Finally they were asked to talk in detail about their experience arriving in the US, their expectations and the realities of living here, and what they considered to be some of the main challenges of coming to the US as refugees. Additionally, they were asked about their experience and relationship with the various organizations supporting refugees in Austin and about the policies and processes connected with refugee resettlement in the US.

Organization directors were also asked to talk about their background and the context in which they began working with refugees. They were then asked about the agencies for which they worked, their goals, and their opinions about the policies and

processes of refugee resettlement. All respondents were asked if they had suggestions for improving refugee resettlement in Austin. The reason for the open-ended semi-structured interviews was to allow issues such as integration, identity, home, and US refugee policy (some of the main issues cited in the research questions) come out naturally in conversation rather than being introduced by the researcher. If these topics, or others of importance to the study, were raised by the respondents then the interviewer would probe on these issues in greater detail. All interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes and were conducted at the University of Texas at Austin. Additionally, all interviews were transcribed and coded for recurring themes, those of which will be discussed in greater length in the following chapters.

### 1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

In the next chapter, I attempt to "place" this study within the broader literatures of migration/refugee studies as well as within geography specifically. In some instances these overlap, of course, as migration and refugee studies are inherently interdisciplinary. Nevertheless, by discussing in detail the concepts and literatures of political geography, geopolitics, and migration studies, I attempt to show where and how these various literatures intersect and where, if at all, this study fits. From this point of departure, I then make an effort to trace the "story" of the Iraqi refugee crisis; from Iraq to Austin, TX.

This "story" begins with a very brief history of Iraq, its past and current population dynamics and movements, and the effects of colonialism and an authoritarian dictatorship on its geography and demography. It tracks some of the sectarian undercurrents that existed before the American-led invasion and then follows in more detail the 2003 invasion itself. From there, the possible causes and consequences of the large-scale movement of Iraqis beginning in 2006, both inside and out of the country, are explored. I then describe the difficult situation for Iraqi refugees after 2006 who were surviving as internally displaced peoples inside of Iraq as well as those who had crossed international borders into Syria, Jordan, and to a lesser extent Lebanon. Turning then to the international response (or lack thereof) to the crisis, I briefly outline the reaction of several European countries and finally the response of the United States.

The remainder of the dissertation concerns itself with the ways in which the US reacted to the crisis and the resulting resettlement of tens of thousands of Iraqis within its borders. In covering the US response the Iraqi refugee crisis, I first discuss the highly political process that took place to begin bringing Iraqis to this country and then the programs and policies that were set up to begin to actually process and admit them. Second, I turn to the numbers of Iraqis admitted to the US and how those numbers fluctuated from 2006-2013 as well as where Iraqis were resettling. Finally, I use my experiences of working at a refugee resettlement agency in Austin, TX and, through numerous in depth interviews, the voices of Iraqi refugees themselves, to take a critical look at how the federal policies and programs for refugees affected the experience of

Iraqi resettlement in the US in 2009 and 2010. In addition to these policies and programs, I look in detail at how other structural barriers may have affected their resettlement. Some of these barriers include the economic recession, a prevailing atmosphere of anti-immigration sentiment, and Islamaphobic tendencies among segments of the American population due in part to the events of 9/11 and continuous military involvement in the Arab and Islamic world. Aside from structural obstacles, I also look some of the cultural aspects that Iraqis bring with them to the US and carry with them throughout the resettlement experience. These cultural aspects are ones that are called out by Iraqis in the interviews and, as can be seen later in the dissertation, can be a help or a hindrance. Further, other aspects of personal agency are discussed based off the interview data such as social capital, mobility, transnational communication, the role of religious organizations and institutions, and perceptions of the importance of citizenship in this country and its role in the overall process of integration. As much as possible, I tried to let the voices of Iraqis tell this story, especially from the time following the 2003 American-led invasion. In the interviews, I had respondents trace their own stories, from Iraq to the United States. In gathering and coding those stories and through my own participant observation, I then attempted to provide a comprehensive critique of the Iraqi resettlement experience here in the US and particularly in Austin, TX. From this critique then, I hope to provide some valuable contributions to larger discussions going on within migration and refugee studies and more broadly within the field of geography.

# Chapter 2: Migration/Refugee Studies, Geopolitics, and Geography: A Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to situate this dissertation research within the relevant literatures. Migration is an inherently interdisciplinary topic and thus research and written works on migration span the social sciences. Refugee studies is largely considered a subsection of migration studies but it is a necessary distinction as there is some debate about the differences and/or similarities between political and economic migrants. It would be impossible and far beyond the scope of this paper to attempt to organize in a coherent way the myriad of academic works on migration that exist. It is necessary then to choose carefully what should be included within this brief amount of space but which will still give proper context for the remainder of the dissertation. This chapter will first strive to discuss the challenges of categorizing different types of migrants and the debates about how refugees may or may not fall easily into any one category. Second, given what Jennifer Hyndman calls the "politics of humanitarianism", refugee aid strategies, especially concerning third-country refugee resettlement, have increasingly become a (geo)political issue involving international cooperation between nation-states, multi-national organizations, and religiously affiliated aid organizations (Hyndman 2000). This chapter will therefore discuss the idea and literature of geopolitics and political geography and how it relates to refugee movements as well as refugee aid strategies. Finally, throughout each of these sections there will be discussions concerning the ways in which migration/refugee studies and geopolitics are intertwined

with the discipline of geography and how this study fits and contributes broadly to these disciplines.

## 2.1 Making Sense of Migration and Refugee Studies: Contemporary Issues and Debates

"Today immigrants appear as threatening outsiders, knocking at the gates, or crashing the gates, or sneaking through the gates into societies richer than those from which the immigrants came" (Sassen 1999, 1). This quote from Saskia Sassen's *Guests and Aliens*, although written in 1999, is still largely relevant today. The negative viewpoint of floods of immigrants and refugees to a country is one of the multiple epistemologies within the discourse surrounding immigration not only to the US but to the "West" in general. It is a point that is necessary to consider in any discussion of global migration today. Sassen does well to show that while this is a dominant theme in contemporary times, it is also an old theme, and in many respects, it is a myth. Increasingly, immigration to Western nations is being frowned upon and heavily guarded and controlled. While the US and European nations espouse the ideals of multiculturalism and diversity, these same nations are struggling to find solutions as to how to manage immigration and multiculturalism within their borders. Broad and complex notions of diversity, community, education, citizenship, integration, transnationalism, and globalization are all connected and intertwined in issues of immigration and local and federal governments are often faced with difficult decisions as to how to negotiate these connected and sometimes conflicting ideas.

Migration, however, is not simply a process of people crashing the gates into richer countries and it cannot be bound by East-West/North-South characterizations. Migration is a process which is carried out by us all in one way or another. As King (2002) states in his article on new ways to "map" European migration:

> I wonder how many of you, reading this paper, have never engaged in some kind of migration…So are migrants therefore still to be regarded as the 'others' who are different from 'us'? Or is it the case that all of us are, in some way or another, migrants or the product of migration? (King 2002, 94)

This is an important point to remember as it illustrates the fact that migration can no longer be viewed as a process simply involving large numbers of poor, uneducated, and desperate peoples pushed merely by economic despair. This view was, however, the most common depiction of migrants in earlier academic discourses (Park 1928). To some extent it has persisted, not so much within academia, but certainly within the media. White (2002), for example, shows how hydraulic metaphors used by the media about incoming migrants and refugees, such as terms like "flood", "flows", and "swamp" suggest that migrants are not only "out of place", but that they are thought of as an impingement and intrusion upon the receiving society as well (2002, 1056). One can find these views in most countries, including the United States where, for example, increasing numbers of Mexican migrants has led to arguments over the use of the Spanish language in schools, the emergence of a "security fence" erected along the US-Mexican border, and the expenses and validity concerning the deportation of "illegal" Mexican migrants. Concern over the persistence of this negative view of migrants has been expressed and discussed by a number of scholars such as Malkki (1992), Sassen (1999), and Appadurai

(2006). But as King notes, migration is a much larger and all-encompassing phenomenon affecting or carried out by, in one way or another, people the world over.

One need not look far to find other examples which highlight the complexity of migration, whether it be forced or voluntary. If one looks, for example, at the thousands of people displaced by major natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005 in New Orleans, the earthquake in the town of L'Aquila in central Italy in 2009, or the devastating 2011 tsunami in Japan, it brings up interesting questions not only in the context of refugee studies and wider discussions about displacement, but also in the broader context of migration studies. Where are people affected by these disasters going? How long will they stay in their respective destinations? What should be the role of the state in their overall wellbeing? Do any types of patterns present themselves in movements such as this in terms of class, gender, ethnicity, or race? What about patterns having to do with their destinations? Are these displaced people refugees? What will be the future ramifications of their movement on the towns and cities which they fled, and even on their nations of origin?

It is interesting to relate these questions, which are pointed at a very specific "type" of migrant, to other categories of migrants. Many of the questions remain the same. If that is true, then how do scholars and researchers begin to make sense of migration? Where do these migrants "fit" in relation to other types of migrants and is grouping migrants a necessity for understanding the various causes and effects of human movement? Asking questions such as this highlights the continuously blurring

distinctions between migrant/migration types. It also illustrates the inherent complexity in trying to make sense of migration.

If one can make the assumption then that migration is affecting most human beings in some way or other, then how can we make sense of this extremely complex and variegated process? With changing economic, political, social, and cultural backdrops, migration patterns and processes change as well. They change spatially and they change temporally. And thus older models, classification schemes, and migration/migrant typologies need to be continually re-assessed and defined. In this context, this section will first briefly review previous migrant typologies and models, then discuss possible new ways to view and/or classify migrants today, and finally, enter into a more nuanced discussion about how refugees fit into this overall process and phenomenon.

### 2.1.1 Previous Migrant Typologies and Classification Schemes

Discussions about theories of migration and classification schemes usually begin with Ravenstein (1889) who first theorized a set of laws of migration based upon his observations and statistical data from most European countries as we as the United States. He thus devises theories or "laws" ranging from different migration stages to migration distances, urban and rural forms of migration, what he terms "migration currents and countercurrents", gender and migration, and technology and migration. His system of laws is, of course, a contextual one which focuses almost exclusively on "Western" forms of migration. It doesn't account for or discuss migration processes and patterns in other

parts of the world such as Asia or Africa. Interestingly, it deals with European migrants going to these places (an outcome of the colonial and imperial era in which he was living) but not the other way around. Ravenstein does discuss different migrant types such as rural and urban migrants, short distance and long distance migrants, and internal and international migrants, but creating a typology for distinctive migrant types is not his main concern. Rather it is to compare and contrast between migration processes and patterns across space in order to devise his "laws of migration".

One of the next works attempting to theorize and classify the migration process in a general sense was Lee's (1966). Lee draws heavily on Ravenstein and again, does not formulate a scheme for classifying migrant types, but instead for hypothesizing about three main aspects of migration: volume of migration, the establishment of stream and counterstream, and the characteristics of migrants. In his analysis of the different characteristics of migrants he sites factors such as "The heightened propensity to migrate at certain stages of the life cycle is important in the selection of migrants" (1966, 57). Through characterizations such as this, one gets a feel for some of the different migrant types he is talking about such as old and young migrants, poor and rich migrants, married and unmarried migrants, and educated and uneducated ones. Lee's paper was much less a comprehensive examination of migration across space as was Ravenstein's, but instead a work meant for guiding future research projects on migration and subsequently for testing future research questions and results against Lee's hypotheses.

Two other early scholars attempting to make sense of migration who should not be overlooked were Fairchild (1918), and Petersen (1958). They are grouped together here (and not part of a more chronological analysis) because of an overall similarity in their formulations (Petersen, as did Lee with Ravenstein's work, admittedly borrows heavily from Fairchild). Fairchild begins by categorizing four main causes of human movement: invasion, conquest, colonization, and finally, immigration. Unlike Ravenstein, Fairchild takes a much more historical (rather than spatial) approach to his classification scheme. The difference between immigration and the other three types of human movement is a sociological one, however, which is based purely upon an individual's decision. It is of importance to his overall discussion of immigration (and later ones) that Fairchild notes:

> …immigration is a distinctly individual undertaking. States may direct, control, regulate, or encourage immigration, but the motives which lead men into this form of movement are strictly individual ones and the causes which arouse these motives are conditions which react upon the individual alone. The end sought is neither the advantage of the country of origin, nor the country of destination, but the improvement of the condition of the individual (1918: 21).

This focus on the individual signals Fairchild's recognition of the strong probability of economic factors as being a reason for the push of the individual from one place to another. For Fairchild, immigration is seen as a way to better oneself. Despite this focus, he does also acknowledge other "less important" types of immigration, specifically, forms of forced migration such as when peoples are expelled from places or "compulsory" forms of migration such as the slave trade (Fairchild 1918, 24). Finally, he makes a very brief comment about internal and intra-state migration.

These typologies are important for Petersen (1958) as he creates his own, focusing largely on issues such as ecological push, migration policy, people's aspirations, and social momentum. Petersen makes an important statement opposing the sole use of statistical data in deducing theories or "laws" about migration. He states, "Migration differs from fertility and mortality in that it cannot be analyzed, even at the outset, in terms of non-cultural, physiological factors, but must be differentiated with respect to relevant social conditions" (265). The overuse of statistics without factoring in social and cultural aspects of the push-pull of migration is where Petersen finds major problems with the way Ravenstein (1889) tried to make sense of migration. One can see from Petersen's typology below (figure 2.1) how he visualizes different forms of migration.

Figure 2.1 Petersen's Migration Typology

| Relation | Migratory Force | Class of Migration | Type of Migration | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | Conservative | Innovating |
| Nature and man | Ecological push | Primitive | Wandering | Flight from the land |
| | | | Ranging | |
| State (or equivalent) and man | Migration policy | Forced | Displacement | Slave trade |
| | | Impelled | Flight | Coolie trade |
| Man and his norms | Higher aspirations | Free | Group | Pioneer |
| Collective behavior | Social momentum | Mass | Settlement | Urbanization |

*Source*: Petersen (1958)

Another important aspect of Petersen's typology is how he begins to recognize and deal at length with some of the more nuanced characteristics of migrant types.

Petersen is one of the first scholars of migration to use the term “continuum” although he does not actually draw up such a model. Nevertheless he does account for some of the complex distinctions of different migrant types especially concerning certain push factors. Notably he states of forced migration in particular:

> It is useful to divide this class into *impelled* migration, when the migrants retain some power to decide whether or not to leave, and *forced* migration, when they do not have this power. Often the boundary between the two, the point at which the choice becomes nominal, may be difficult to set. Analytically, however, the distinction is clear cut, and historically it is often so. The difference is real, for example, between the Nazis' policy (roughly 1933-38) of encouraging Jewish emigration by various anti-Semitic acts and laws, and the later policy (roughly 1938-45) of herding Jews into cattle-trains and trans-porting them to camps (Petersen 1958: 261, emphasis original).

Distinguishing between these two instances is an important departure from some of the previous ways of thinking about migration. No longer must migrants be thought of necessarily in terms of a series of boxes or rows and columns. Rather they can be thought of as having a place along a spectrum. Although Petersen does not actually use the term or idea of a spectrum, he does think about migration along a sort of continuum. Later in the paper one finds that Petersen does use the word “continuum” while, at the same time, reflecting on some of his criticisms of Ravenstein’s (1889) work:

> While few today would follow Ravenstein's example by denoting their statements "laws," most treatments of migratory selection still imply a comparable degree of generality. Even the best discussions typically neglect to point out that selection ranges along a continuum, from total migration to total non-migration, or that the predominance of females in rural-urban migration that Ravenstein noted must be contrasted with male predominance in, for example, India's urbanization (Petersen 1958: 265)

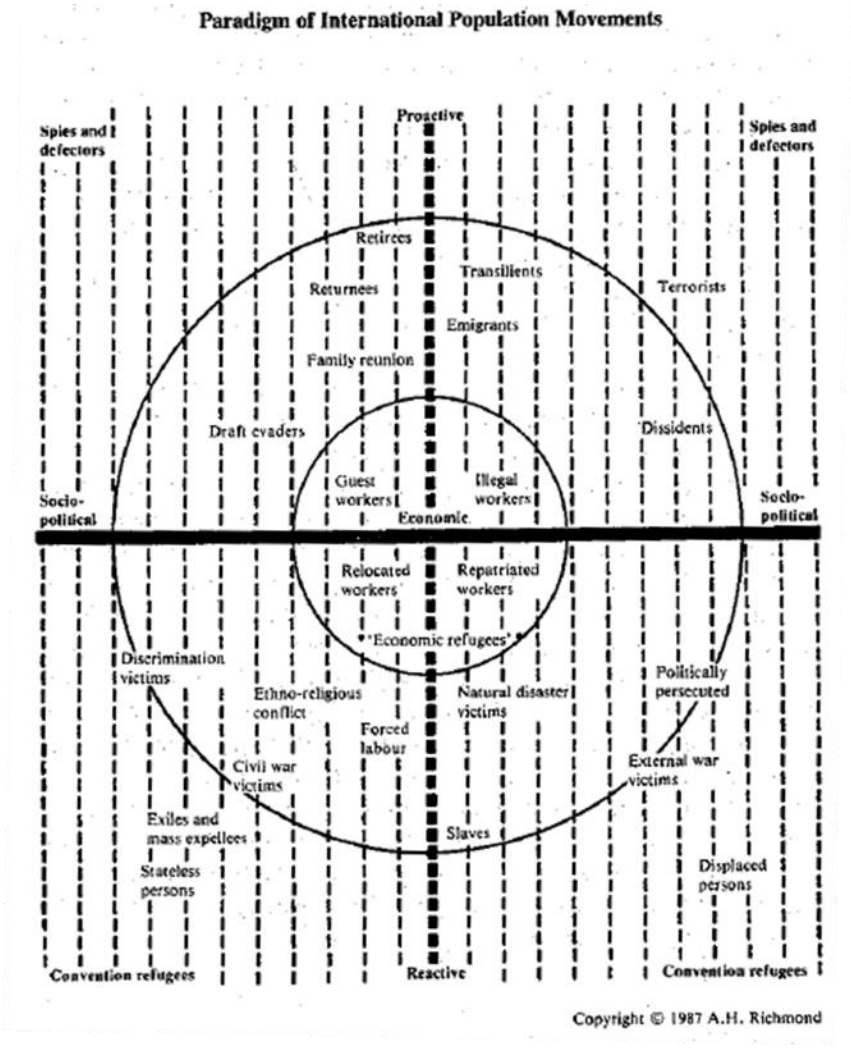
Petersen's typology and ideas about a continuum which accounts for the different shades of migrant types, continues to be used in more current studies of migration and in theories of migration (Krishnan and Odynak 1987). Richmond (1988) borrows from it to create what he calls "the migrant continuum". Richmond demonstrates the inherent difficulty in categorizing migrant types into clearly delineated and different groupings. Creating a migrant continuum as Richmond does is helpful in that it does not box in particular migrant types which may either straddle the borders of the various categorizations or who contain characteristics from more than one of the categories. Moreover, while Richmond's continuum was created for thinking about all migrant types, he is, as the title of his paper makes clear, talking primarily about refugees. In developing his model he states:

> All human behavior is constrained. Choices are not unlimited but are determined by the structuration process. However, 'degrees of freedom' may vary. Individual and group autonomy and potency are situationally determined. It would be more appropriate to recognize a continuum at one end of which individuals and collectivities are *proactive* and at the other *reactive*. Under certain conditions, the decision to move may be made after due consideration of all relevant information, rationally calculated to maximize net advantage, including both material and symbolic rewards. At the other extreme, the decision to move may be made in a state of panic facing a crisis situation which leaves few alternatives but escape from intolerable threats. Between these two extremes, many of the decisions made by both 'economic' and 'political' migrants are a response to diffuse anxiety generated by a failure of the social system to provide for the fundamental needs of the individual, biological, economic, and social (Richmond 1988: 17, emphasis original).

Below we find the visual manifestation of Richmond's continuum (figure 2). Despite what one would infer from the quote above (that Richmond's spectrum is strictly

horizontal with two extremes), the diagram actually contains a y and an x axis. The vertical axis represents decision-making and the horizontal axis represents "the interaction of economic and sociopolitical forces, reflecting that they come full circle as internal and external state powers converge" (Richmond 1988, 20). Richmond's paradigm does a good job of identifying and dealing with the many shades of gray in terms of human movement. It, however, fails to account for any kind of spatial variable.

Figure 2.2 Richmond's Paradigm of International Population Movements




*Source*: Richmond (1988)

Even a continuum or model that did account for spatial variables would fall short, however, in explaining new types of migration, particularly for transnational migrants. Broadly, this point stresses the need for the continual reassessment of migration/migrant typologies and theories as migration itself is a continually changing and dynamic process. More specifically, it raises the point about transnationalism, which has become a new

paradigm in migration studies. In order to try to make sense of migration taking into account the current concept of transnational communities, which can broadly be defined as, "a set of intense, cross-border social relations that enable individuals to participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations", then a different sort of diagram would have to be created (Bailey 2001, 413). Even if this were done, however, it would still fail in highlighting the different social, cultural, political, and economic forces which come to bear on such movements. How does one account, for example, for the effects of national/international policy, humanitarian aid and benefits (if there are any), existing or forming ethnic migrant communities in the place of arrival, upon the various types of migrant characterized in a chart, diagram, or classification scheme? This becomes increasingly difficult due to processes such as globalization and technological advances such as the internet, although attempts are still being made which are much more "up to date" than any of the previously mentioned typologies, from Ravenstein's to Richmond's.

Using the concept of transnationalism as a backdrop Pries (2001) figures there to be four "ideal-types" of migrants: immigrants, return migrants, diaspora migrants, and transmigrants. Looking at past migrant typologies, Pries reconsiders them, taking into account the current importance of transnationalism. Within this reassessment he identifies a new kind of social space which is, for him, a transnational social space where the permanence of international borders begin to fade as people are able to not only communicate across borders but also live and move among two or more places continuously, creating the possibility of forming more than one national and/or cultural

identity. Pries' article falls short, though, in making a clear delineation between transnational communities and diasporic communities, which to an extent can also be transnational.

Finally, King (2002) critiques and criticizes previous typologies of migrant types and their many dualisms or "migration dyads", in particular. King accurately states:

> We need to appreciate that many of the key questions that were asked to frame our understanding of the functioning of migration now have a very different array of answers from the largely economic ones which shaped our earlier analyses. Now, new mobility strategies are deployed to achieve economic and, importantly, non-economic objectives. In the new global and European map of migration, the old dichotomies of migration study – internal versus international, forced versus voluntary, temporary versus permanent, legal versus illegal – blur as both the motivations and modalities of migration become much more diverse (2002: 89).

King suggests that some of the new migrant types that need to be included to a greater extent in studies of migration are independent female migration, migrations of crisis, skilled and professional migrations, student migration, retirement migration, and "hybrid-tourism" migration. These "new" types of migrant should by no means be looked at as a complete picture. More importantly, they are simply a current dynamic of today's broader migration "map" that are often overlooked by researchers, although since the publication of King's article in 2002 a growing number of studies have appeared discussing these new migrant types (King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Baláz and Williams 2004; Ackers 2005). The migrant/migration typologies and classification schemes listed above do not by any means represent the entirety of these sorts of paradigms which have been established (others which could be included are Wilbur Zelinsky 1971; Kunz 1973).

Instead, they are meant to show the complexity of migration and, particularly, the complexity of making sense of migration. The typologies included here try not only to make sense of the process of migration as a whole, but also of how the classification of the refugee/forced migrant fits into this broader discussion. The following section thus deals with the issue of the refugee in the phenomenon of migration.

### 2.1.2 The Refugee within Geography and Migration Studies

Given the fact that migration is such a pervasive issue and happens at all scales, migration studies is an area of research that has long interested geographers. Geography has thus played an important role in migration research over the years. Gober and Tyner identify four main themes that represent current migration studies in geography: "1) the effects of economic restructuring on migration patterns and processes; 2) the effects of demographic cycles on migration rates and timing; 3) the integration of migration and residential mobility into a life-course perspective; 4) ethnographic approaches to migration" (2003, 187). A significant omission to this list is the effects of political processes on migration. In the last decade and a half, however, there has been a trend in geographical migration studies focusing on the political and geopolitical aspects and causes of migration (Leitner 1997; Tesfahuney 1998; Hyndman 2000; Wright and Ellis 2000; C. R. Nagel 2002; A. Mountz 2003; Caroline R. Nagel and Staeheli 2005a; Blitz 2007; Gamlen 2008; Coutin 2010; Alison Mountz 2011). Regardless of this omission in Gober and Tyner's article, migration research in geography is becoming increasingly

popular due to the rich yet complex issues that are prevalent within it. One of those issues is refugee studies.

Like other sub-fields of migration research, refugee studies has no academic disciplinary home. Due to the variety of issues within refugee studies it is inherently interdisciplinary. Refugee studies includes issues covered in the fields of law (Khanna 2006; Cohen 2008; Travis 2009), clinical psychology (Smid et al. 2011), health and medicine (Shoeb, Weinstein, and Halpern 2007; Mitschke et al. 2011; Inhorn and Serour 2011), social work (L. Briggs 2011; Harding and Libal 2012) and, of course, the various disciplines within the social sciences. There is surprisingly, however, a dearth of research on refugee issues within the field of geography. This is a shame since many topics concerning refugees and refugee resettlement reach the heart of human geography. A field which has dedicated much of its efforts to studying the diverse characteristics of space and place, social justice, and disadvantaged and minority populations, exploring the complexities of refugee migration and international refugee resettlement fits well within geography. Whether examining the extremely controlled and political process of refugee movement across space or looking at the effects of refugee movement on sending and receiving communities, third-country refugee resettlement as an aspect of migration merits more attention within the field. This is especially true as the manner in which refugee resettlement is negotiated by various stakeholders can be helpful for understanding many of the broader issues of migration. Geographers who *have* focused on refugees in the past have often done so largely in the context of the Horn of Africa

(Rogge 1985; Black and Robinson 1993; Bascom 1993; Kuhlman 1994; Bascom 1998; Hyndman 2000). Even outside of the field of geography, much research on aspects of refugee integration in the "West" takes place outside the US (Robinson 1993; Waxman 2001; Mestheneos and Loannidi 2002; Lamba 2003; Ager and Strang 2008; Stewart et al. 2008). There have been some works, although not many, which begin to tackle the issue of forced migration and displacement in the region of the Middle East (Chatty 2010; Shami 1996; Shami 1994). Works focusing specifically on aspects of Middle Eastern or Arab refugee populations resettling in the "West" are also concentrated mainly outside of the United States, specifically Europe, Canada, and Australia (Al-Rasheed 1994; M. Graham and Khosravi 1997; Waxman 2001; Sparrow 2005; Hyndman and McLean 2006; Casimiro, Hancock, and Northcote 2007; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Qasmiyeh 2010). With the increasing number of Iraqi refugees arriving to the United States since 2005-2006, there is an opening for exploring the experiences of a new Arab refugee population arriving to the United States. Works focusing specifically on Arab immigrants in the United States touch upon many important points which are not easily distinguishable within refugee and broader migration studies such as identity, political activism, transnationalism, integration, and citizenship (Y. Y. Haddad 2004; C. Nagel and Staeheli 2004; Caroline R. Nagel and Staeheli 2005b; Ajrouch and Jamal 2007; Wald 2008). The point that there is overlap among analytical analyses between refugee studies and migration studies broadly has created some debates among migration/refugee researchers. One of these debates has to do with the use of/lack of theory within refugee studies

(which will be covered in the next chapter), while another has to do with the definition of a refugee and the question of, is a refugee any different than a so-called economic migrant.

It is clear from the typologies discussed in the previous section that people who are forced from their homes (for whatever reason) deserve a place in even the earliest models on migration such as Fairchild's (1918)[3]. In Ravenstein's (1889) "Laws of Migration" he makes no reference to forced migration, refugees, or displacement. Whether because of historical or cultural context, this idea for him was not significant enough for him to include it in his paper. Fairchild, on the other hand discusses the term "forced migration", albeit as more of a side note (1918: 23-24). Lee (1966) and Petersen (1958) both discuss forced migration. Gonzalez (1961) identified five types of migration based on her research in the Caribbean and they were: seasonal, temporary non seasonal, recurrent, continuous, and permanent. It was not until 1989 that she added "conflict migration" as one of her primary types (Gonzalez 1989). Kunz (1973) responds both the Lee and Petersen in developing his own, more nuanced, model of different refugee types.

These points raise issues and questions as to the differences between forced migrants/refugees and other types of migrants. Researchers within academia, government bureaucrats, and employees for various non-governmental organizations cannot seem to agree on a single definition for the term refugee (L. H. Malkki 1996;

[3] Indeed, there were a number of examples of forced migration around this time. Notably among them was the great "population exchange" between Turkey and Greece which began after the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 and resulted in the forced displacement of around 2 million people.

Bascom 1998; D. A. Martin 2005). Related to this point, many scholars researching aspects of migration claim the differences between refugees and other types of migrants are becoming increasingly unclear (Black and Robinson 1993; Daley 1993; Hyndman and Mountz 2007). What has become increasingly clear, however, from the above typologies and classifications, especially Petersen's (1958) and Richmond's (1988), is that one should not distinguish solely between the economic and political factors of migration. This distinction is far too ambiguous. And surely, an "economic" migrant/refugee, defined as someone who is fleeing their home because of severe economic conditions and who is experiencing high levels of poverty, could be just as desperate to migrate as someone fleeing from violence or persecution. Sassen brings up important questions when she states:

> Within the framework of West European states, the question "Who is a refugee?" is finally complicated by the growing belief that these are economic migrants masquerading as political victims. Who is a refugee? Are those driven by economic despair which may come from war and generalized oppression as was the case with the 2.5 million Jews who left Russia and East Europe between 1880 and World War I "legitimate" refugees? Does such a broadening of the definition undermine the status of refugee? Is control by the state over the definition of refugees tenable in the new political and economic reality of Western Europe, one characterized by growing transnationalization? (1999, 5–6)

Another group of authors make the point that the debate surrounding the question of "who is a refugee?" should go much further than the economic/political migrant dichotomy. One now also needs to consider the possibility of redefining the term refugee by including those who are displaced by natural disasters and/or who are internally displaced within the category. Putting it more bluntly they offer:

> It may be difficult to ascertain whether asylum seekers, economic migrants, and those displaced by war and in need of protection are 'voluntary' or 'involuntary' migrants. Moreover, it is possible for individuals to become displaced within their own country, to be uprooted…by a natural disaster, by civil strife…, or by the militarization of the economy conducted or facilitated by their own state…The globalization of economy also turns farmers and/or indigenous populations into internally displaced people when a government expropriates them in order to allocate space to multinational companies or to developers… (Hajdukowski-Ahmed 2008, 33)

Some organizations have even gone so far as to develop a new definition of who can or should be included as a refugee and one example comes from the World Council of Churches (WCC) who have chosen to adopt the term "uprooted people" rather than focusing solely on the UNHCR's more narrow definition of refugees. In their discussion of uprooted people, the WCC recognizes the variety of ways that peoples are forcibly displaced from their home, whether it is inside or outside their country of nationality. In addition to those forcibly displaced by war and persecution who end up outside their country of nationality (i.e. refugees defined by the 1951 Refugee Convention), the WCC places equal emphasis and importance onto those displaced for reasons such as sexual trafficking, natural disasters, and anyone whose livelihood has been threatened or destroyed due to the broad and far-reaching effects of globalization[4].

So, is there a difference between an economic migrant and a political refugee? The answer is no and yes and it is largely based on the type of refugee to which one is referring and the definition under which one is currently working. While the legal

[4] http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/central-committee/geneva-2005/reports-and-documents/genpub-5-second-report-of-the-public-issues-committee.html

definition of a refugee under the terminology developed by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees 1951 Convention relating to the status of Refugees and the following 1967 protocols reads as, "a person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country", there are many other ways in which organizations and researchers view and define refugees. Some prefer to use a very broad definition of the term. Zolberg et al, for example, states that refugees are "persons whose presence abroad is attributable to a well-founded fear of violence" (Zolberg, Suhrke, and Aguayo 1989, 33). Others use a more detailed approach when thinking about how to define a refugee. Joly et al (Joly, Nettleton, and Poulton 1992), when discussing refugee and asylum issues in Europe, categorize refugee types in a way that is similar to some of the models discussed above. They develop five specific types of refugees: 1) 'convention refugees' who are recognized by the terminology of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the status of refugees; 2) 'mandate refugees' which is the category that indicates that refugees are recognized by UNHCR but not by the host government; 3) 'humanitarian refugees' are those granted the right to stay in a country on humanitarian grounds but which implies less rights than full refugee status or 'convention status'; 4) 'de facto refugees' which is the category referring to those who are refugees in practice, but have not sought refugee status for various reasons; and 5) 'refugees in orbit', those who move between different (European) countries in search of a more permanent

status (Joly, Nettleton, and Poulton 1992). Bascom in finding a definition for refugees cites Richmond's continuum (discussed above) stating, "Refugee movements ought to be viewed on a continuum stretching from proactive migrants...to reactive migrants" (1998, 4). Some groups have gone so far as to create their own working definition of who should be included in the category of refugee

Researchers now take it as a given that it is unnecessary and ambiguous to make the distinction between political and economic migrants since so many of the questions they ask about these two types of migrants are the same. This coupled with the fact that people fleeing severe economic conditions may be just as "desperate" as an individual fleeing violence and persecution makes the exercise of trying to distinguish between the two quite difficult. In this sense, the answer is no, there is not much difference between an economic migrant and political refugee. However, in a political-international and national framework the answer is yes. Whether it is fair or not, international political organizations such as the UN and national governments such as the US do distinguish between these two types of migrants, however ambiguous the process of distinguishing may be. And therefore, from the moment that an individual is "legally" defined as a refugee (either by the UN or the State) and when he/she reaches their subsequent destination, they become eligible (and this varies from country to country) for a number of federal/state/local benefits which many other migrants do not enjoy. So while Malkii states that, "refugees do not constitute a naturally self-delimiting domain of anthropological knowledge", she is both right and wrong: right in that anyone who is

forced from their home when they do not want to leave should be able to be grouped within the same term, and for whom many of the same questions having to do with migration can be asked; but wrong in that the experience of a certain type of refugee (specifically a "legally" designated one) is not different from other migrants in their migratory experience.

Legally designated refugees sometimes take part in the humanitarian enterprise of international third-country refugee resettlement. This is a particularly new form of international migration primarily beginning after WWII and on a much larger scale during and after the Vietnam War (Martin 2005). While there are many thousands of "legally documented" refugees languishing in refugee camps and cities in border countries around the world, living primarily off of their own resources and meager humanitarian aid, there are also many refugees, who by process of selection take part in the process of "third country resettlement". These refugees have their travel organized and paid for them through a coordinated effort of international governmental and non-governmental organizations, they often have little choice of where they migrate to, they receive federal benefits in the country of resettlement for a given time depending on the country in which they resettle, and they often follow different rules in terms of eventually acquiring (if they choose not to return to their country of origin) citizenship in the country of resettlement. These aspects alone are significantly different from other types of migrants in terms of the refugees travelling experience, choice of destination (or lack thereof), and integration experience. In this regard, it can be very useful to conduct

research on refugees, whether they be in the second or third country of asylum, asking very different questions than one would with other types of migrants. And the answers may be different as well as they speak to general issues of the validity/usefulness of human rights and the humanitarian enterprise (Terry 2002; Helton 2002; Ilana 2007; Herzog 2009), the "crisis" of the nation-state (Hein 1993; Sassen 1999; Benhabib 2004; Appadurai 2006), and the questionable process of state selection and exclusion of refugees and asylees (Loescher and Scanlan 1986; Keely 1996; Grewal 2005; Khanna 2006; Hyndman and Mountz 2007; Varsanyi 2008). At an individual or human level the answers may also be different in terms of psychological issues (Shoeb, Weinstein, and Halpern 2007; Savy and Sawyer 2008) and all types of integration whether it be social, economic, etc. (Black 1993; Mestheneos and Loannidi 2002; Lamba 2003). Whether at the international level of human rights, the level of the State, or the level of the household/individual, researching refugees is useful for understanding an important aspect of international migration in the present historical, geopolitical and geographical context. Furthermore, this aspect makes a unique contribution to migration studies as a whole as the "legal" third-country refugee is different from other types of migrants, even as this categorization is contextual itself. Because so much of refugee movement is controlled by international political entities and at the level of the State, refugee movement is and has become an extremely politicized type of migration. And it is in this framework that it is necessary then to turn to the subfields of geopolitics and political

geography to help place refugee studies within its proper contextual and thematic boundaries.

## 2.2 Political Geography, Geopolitics, and the Refugee

Geopolitics as a concept and idea has gained popularity in its usage over the past couple of decades, often to the point of ubiquity. Nonetheless, the concept has its roots in the field of geography and with the present global connectedness of political conflict and violence, refugee issues and movements have largely become characterized as being "geopolitical". It is indeed characterized as such in this paper. Therefore, a definition of the term is necessary. Below I will reflect on the various meanings and critiques of geopolitics, how they fit into the broader disciplinary boundaries of political geography, and finally, how the concept of geopolitics informs "problems" of mobility and the refugee.

### 2.2.1 Political Geography

Political geography is not a neatly defined or well-organized sub-field within the overall discipline of geography. As Ó Tuathail and Shelley clearly state, "the intellectual domain called 'political geography' is a convenient fiction around which some scholars identify themselves while others do not" (Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Shelley 2003, 165). In their attempt at reviewing the sub-field, they focus on what they call "untidy political geographies"; relevant research clusters that are, of course, both political and

geographical. Geopolitics informs a number of the works the authors cite in a variety of the research clusters which they identify as having particular importance to political geography at the beginning of the 21st century. Some of these clusters include: political economic geographies, electoral geography and representation, politics of the body, politics of the environment, techno-political geographies, cultural political geographies, and critical geopolitics. Although critical geopolitics is one of the clusters Ó Tuathail and Shelley (2003) identify, geopolitics as an idea finds significant prominence throughout the chapter. While this may be due to the fact that the main author of the chapter is the author of *Critical Geopolitics: The Politics of Writing Global Space* (Gearóid Ó Tuathail 1996), it is probably more concerned with the reality that aspects of globalization and technological advancements in transportation and modes of information have allowed for increased communication and interaction between states and peoples across space. Geopolitics is thus becoming an inevitable part of studies in political geography.

Looking at other introductions to political geography is insightful as they show differences and similarities to Ó Tuathail and Shelley's (2003) review of the sub-field. It is also helpful then for getting a broad overview of the field and how it relates to and intersects with geopolitics. Agnew et al (J. A. Agnew, Mitchell, and Toal 2003), for example, have a similar view, albeit more comprehensive than the chapter in *Geography in America* . This could stem (again) partly from Ó Tuathail's influence (he is one of the three editors) but it is more likely that the collection of works represents a phase in the

discipline of geography which hovers around postmodern and post-positivist critiques. Unlike Ó Tuathail and Shelley (2003), however, Agnew et al try to define the field (departing slightly from Ó Tuathail and Shelley's comment about political geography being a "convenient fiction"), neatly organizing it around a few themes that they claim have been prevalent throughout its history:

> As an area of study, "political geography" has changed historically but the theme of borders and orders, power, and resistance are always central to its operation. For us, political geography is about how barriers between people and their political communities are put up and come down; how world orders based on different geographic organizing principles (such as empires, state systems, and ideological-material relationships) arise and collapse; and how material processes and political movements are re-making how we inhabit and imagine the "world political map" (Agnew et al 2003: 2).

Agnew et al first traverse what they identify to be the main "modes of thinking" in political geography today which includes one chapter on "Geopolitical Themes and Postmodern Thought" (Slater 2003). Later in the book there is an entire section of chapters dedicated to critical geopolitics. There are of course numerous other contributions in the book dealing with issues the editors consider to be representative of political geography: territory, boundaries, scale, identity, the nation-state, citizenship, sexual politics, and the politics of nature. Left out seem to be issues of domestic and global political economy, effects of technological and informational advancements, and issues of internal and international migration. Additionally, there are no examples of a positivist or humanist outlook on (geo)political geographic issues.

Cox (2002) on the other hand has quite a different idea of what political geography entails. Without a single mention of geopolitics throughout the book, Cox

states in his introduction, "Above all, political geography focuses on the twin ideas of territory and territoriality" (2002: 1). Cox's text concentrates largely on the ties between political geography and economy, development, and difference, but almost always in the context of the dual ideas of territory and territoriality. He spends two chapters at the beginning of the book, for example, chronicling and analyzing "The Political Geography of Capitalist Development" (63-140). Cox's omission of geopolitics as a major theme within political geography is instructive as it points to a subtle debate within the sub-field over the importance and value of the concept.

A more balanced approach to reviewing political geography may be through Blacksell (2005) who makes due note of geopolitics but does not make it a major section of the book. Moreover, Blacksell focuses on political geographic issues that are more national/local in scope and are not inherently geopolitical. Such issues include electoral geographies, civil society, political parties, and the local state system. These issues can be found elsewhere (Erlingsson 2008; Warf 2009) of course owing to the fact that not all political geography is geopolitical geography. Although it could be argued otherwise, issues such as the Electoral College and U.S. voting patterns which Warf (2009) discusses have less influence on and, similarly, are less influenced by, international relations and world politics. Examples such as these serve to illustrate that while the relationship between political geography and geopolitics is strong, it is not always present.

These examples (Agnew et al 2003; Ó Tuathail and Shelley 2003; Cox 2002; Blacksell 2005) highlight not only the differences in definitions and conceptions of political geography, but also the subtle contestations and debates over geopolitics within political geography. They show that geopolitics continues to be a controversial term, even into the 21st century, when it has experienced somewhat of a "revival" (J. A. Agnew 1998). The histories, meanings, and "revival" of geopolitics will be explored below, as well as how it fits into the overall subfield of political geography.

### 2.2.2 Geopolitics

Geopolitics as a concept and a term is contested within academia. How geopolitics has been studied in academia, especially geography, has also been heavily debated and contested. The term has a century-long history in which it has fallen in and out of favor, not only within academia but also in the media and in its popular usage. In attempting to come to a definition of the term, Mamadouh chooses the simplest of definitions; "Although the term 'geopolitics' covers many different approaches, it can broadly be seen as a synonym for the political geography of international relations" (2005, 45). This definition is problematic not only because it is so vague, but also because it supports the common-sense usage of the term when it is actually, especially within academia, a complicated idea with multiple meanings and histories. In contrast, Flint (2006) states that to understand and analyze world politics (geopolitics) one must operate with more than one definition. To do this he focuses on four aspects of

geopolitics: 1) statesmanship, or the territorial strategies of states, 2) geopolitics as a way of "seeing the world", 3) the importance of the idea of "situated knowledges", and 4) the significance of the development of critical geopolitics (Flint 2006, 13–16). Flint attempts to encapsulate these competing notions in a single definition stating, "Contemporary geopolitics identifies the sources, practices, and representations that allow for the control of territory and the extraction of resources" (2006:16).

Agnew (1998) also has trouble defining the term. He first states that while geopolitics has long been used to refer to practices that emphasize world politics, the term has experienced a "revival" in recent years. Agnew thus states that geopolitics, "is now used freely to refer to such phenomena as international boundary disputes, the structure of global finance, and geographical patterns of election results" (Agnew 1998: 2). Despite these claims, Agnew himself chooses to work from a slightly different definition which states that geopolitics is the, "examination of the geographical assumptions, designations, and understandings that enter into the making of world politics" (1998:2). Reflection on these definitions reveal, however, that Agnew and Flint are not so much defining geopolitics as a concept, but rather they are defining ways to study, understand, or contribute to geopolitics. If one can assume that a basic definition of geopolitics is essentially its "classical" definition which emphasizes statesmanship or the practices of states gaining/maintaining territory and sovereignty, then that leaves geographers with various and unique options for understanding these practices. Geographers are thus in an advantageous position to reflect on how and why these

practices are carried out and, more importantly, the outcomes and effects of these practices upon borders, populations, and identity.

Finally, in reaching a better understanding of geopolitics, it is useful to look at the introductions to the first and second editions of Ó Tuathail et al's *The Geopolitics Reader* (1998; 2006). In the first edition Ó Tuathail states:

> All concepts have histories and geographies, and the term 'Geopolitics' is no exception. The word 'geopolitics' has had a long and varied history in the twentieth century, moving well beyond its original meanings…Coming up with a specific definition of geopolitics is notoriously difficult, for the meanings of concepts like geopolitics tends to change as historical periods and structures of world order change. Geopolitics is best understood in its historical and discursive context of use (Gearóid Ó Tuathail 1998, as quoted in; Dodds and Atkinson 2000, 8)

In the introduction to the second edition of the book, however, Ó Tuathail scraps the earlier statement almost entirely (except for the first sentence) and states, "the conventional understanding today is that geopolitics is discourse about world politics, with a particular emphasis on state competition and the geographical dimensions of power" (2006, 1). The differences between the two definitions are striking; one highlights a temporal aspect of geopolitics while the second concentrates on its spatial characteristics. When Ó Tuathail states that it is best to understand geopolitics "in its historical and discursive context of use", he is emphasizing an earlier and less "critical" form of the concept. In the second definition, however, he is not only nodding towards a more critical/postmodern critique of geopolitics, but also illuminating the spatial dimensions of the concept. Although it would be contradictory to include both these

quotations within the same chapter, they are equally useful for coming to a better understanding of what geopolitics is and also why it is a contested term. Only by looking at both the geographical aspects and historical dimensions of geopolitical works and scholarship can this be done.

Geography's role in geopolitics runs deep as the term was coined in 1899 by Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish geographer/political scientist whose work was greatly influenced by that of Friedrich Ratzel who wrote *Politische Geographie* (Political Geography) (G. J. Martin 2005; Dodds and Atkinson 2000; Gearóid Ó Tuathail 1996). It is also important to mention here Kjellen's contemporary, Sir Halford Mackinder whose Heartland theory was influential for future British and American foreign policy decisions (Martin 2005b). Kjellen's work, on the other hand, is thought to have influenced Nazi geopoliticians of the 1930's, namely Karl Haushofer, who believed that racial hierarchies combined with notions of state vitality could be used to defend Germany's territorial expansion (Agnew 1998). This use of "geopolitik" in 1930's Germany made the term unpopular and even taboo in the following two decades until it started to be used again during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union.

Although the practice of geopolitics had been in place before the term was actually coined, it was at the time of and because of scholars such as Kjellen and Mackinder that Agnew and others stress the importance of this moment, when Western (mainly European) powers began to "view the world as a whole" (Gregory 1994; J. A. Agnew 1998; Flint 2006). This aspect of late 19$^{th}$/early 20$^{th}$ century geographical

imaginations has been widely discussed by those writing critical geopolitics as it stresses for these authors the "situated knowledges" of scholars such as Kjellen and Mackinder (Gearóid Ó Tuathail and Agnew 1992; Ryan 1994). Present works on early geopoliticians like Mackinder are usually more than descriptions of his scholarship; they at once contextualize and problematize his early writings as part of a discourse justifying and arguing for territorial expansion and control. Taking this a step further, Dodds and Atkinson state that these types of political geographical imaginations, i.e. "seeing the world as a whole" and territoriality, sustain "the distinctions drawn between the domestic Self and external Others…and the moral and physical boundaries that divide the world into 'our' space and 'their' spaces" (2000, 10). These types of critiques are examples of studies which can be categorized under what is termed "critical geopolitics".

As Ó Tuathail and Shelley accurately observe of political geography in a general sense, it is, "increasingly defined and dominated by critical post-positivist approaches and perspectives" (2003, 165). This certainly holds true for geopolitical studies as well and can be identified as one of the reasons for the emergence and burgeoning of critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics, according to Ó Tuathail (1996) has four main sub-areas under which research is conducted. These four areas are formal, practical, popular, and structural (G. Ó Tuathail 1999). Formal geopolitics refers to the deconstructions of earlier geopolitical thought such as those mentioned above which critique the "situated knowledges" of Mackinder and Kjellen. Practical geopolitics concerns critiques of the more current and everyday geopolitical actions of state foreign policy (Mercille 2008).

Popular geopolitics has to do with the outcomes and meanings of the geographical politics represented through the media and popular culture (Adams 2004; 2007). Finally, structural geopolitics refers to the broad processes that structure the way states practice and conduct foreign policy such as globalization, migration, international corporatization, and social movements (Dahlman 2005; Sassen 1999).

Critical geopolitics sits in contrast to classical or "orthodox" geopolitics. O Tuathail and Shelley overstate the differences between these two main areas:

> Within political geography there has always been a tradition of skepticism towards orthodox geopolitics, the intellectual and political practice of interpreting the earth and global political transformations for the benefit of one's own state and its leaders. Orthodox geopolitics is problem-solving geopolitics for state strategy and foreign policy practice…Critical geopolitics, by contrast, is a problematizing theoretical enterprise that places the existing structures of power and knowledge into question (Ó Tuathail 2003: 173).

This statement essentializes any type of geopolitics other than a critical one. It suggests that any type of contribution to geopolitics which would not be classified as "critical" is suspect as it is developed specifically for the precarious goals of Western foreign policy. While this may have been true for Kjellen or Mackinder (and that is also disputable), geopolitical studies done in a tradition other than a critical geopolitical one *can* be useful for more than just the benefit of state strategy and foreign policy practice. And they can certainly be theoretically sound for an academic audience while still being beneficial for state strategy. Moreover, even if a study is carried out which can be categorized, as the authors put it above, "for the benefit of one's own state and its leaders", it does not necessarily mean that the study will be carried out for malicious purposes. Is it not the

hope and goal of many (geo)political geographers that their work will make a difference outside of academia and possibly to stimulate a change in their government's domestic/foreign policy for the better? This is certainly the case with Wood, Chief Geographer at the US Department of State, who has written on complex emergencies, war crimes investigations, and the use of GIS in enhancing knowledge (and that includes the knowledge of government leaders and policy makers) of these important geopolitical issues (Wood 1996; 2000; Wood and Smith 1997). Wood's examples of "applied political geography" illustrate the fact that works exemplifying classical geopolitics can be useful and beneficial inside and outside of academia.

Another more recent example of a collection of (geo)political and geographical works not engaging with critical geopolitics is Flint's edited text (2005). Flint states pointedly in the introduction:

> Before I outline the themes, it should be stated that this book is not another example of critical geopolitics. Critical geopolitics has been an essential, provocative, and informative component of political geography. Its aim and ability to deconstruct the spatial ingredient of political tropes to illustrate the power relations that lie behind the 'naturalization' of political spaces have produced some of the most compelling contemporary political geography. In addition, critical geopolitics has spawned a large number of books, book chapters, and journal articles. In this book, analyses of war rely less on deconstruction and more on the explanation of political processes of war and their spatial expression. In other words, this book will provide constructions of theoretically derived geographies that explain war to complement critical geopolitics that deconstruct discourses (Flint 2005, 5).

This is a salient comment about and aimed at critical geopolitics. Although Flint affirms the positive aspects of critical geopolitics, he also signals its possible overuse and thus its bent towards becoming an all-encompassing meta-narrative for thinking about the

political geography of world politics. With this compilation, Flint steps back towards a more "traditional" yet nonetheless significant type of geopolitics. The examples of O'Loughlin (2005) and Dahlman (2005), both of whom have contributed to critical geopolitics, in this text show that there is more than one way to view, research, and write about geopolitics. Still, this collection of works focuses on many of the classic, yet broad, concepts of political geography and geopolitics such as territory, borders, political/social movements, and diplomacy. It is missing, however, any kind of humanistic contribution illustrating the effects of war and peace on individuals, and how those individuals negotiate their experience locally, regionally, nationally, or globally. While it is doubtful that Flint's collection signals a departure from the dominance of critical geopolitics and postmodern discourses in general in political geography, it is a useful example of the continuance of alternative voices and paradigms within the subfield. Furthermore, Flint's compilation and the other texts mentioned in this section strive to illustrate the interconnections between geopolitics and political geography, showing their relationships and correlations, yet not representing them as one in the same or as two completely different entities.

### 2.3 CONCLUSION

While issues of migration and mobility are receiving more attention from geographers working within the subfields of political geography and geopolitics, it should still have a much more prominent role given the topic's influence and effect upon political affairs at all scales. Studying the political aspects of migration and refugees

should be an interdisciplinary enterprise in which geography plays a major role. Questions about refugee movements should be of specific concern to political geographers as the number of refugees around the world rises along with increasing political conflicts and sectarian violence.

One of the major ways geographers have contributed to the geopolitics of refugee studies is through the debate within the discipline on the argument over the blurring lines between economic and political refugees. As Gober and Tyner point out, "Research reveals the ambiguity of separating refugees, strictly defined as those people living outside the country of their nationality and unwilling to return because of a 'well-founded fear of persecution,' from economic migrants. Refugees are in fact motivated by a set of forces similar to those that influence other migrants…" (2003: 189). Arguing along these same lines, Jones (1989) shows how Salvadoran refugees cited economic issues over political violence as their main reasons for migrating to the US. Bascom (1993; 1998) concentrates on how the refugee movement and resettlement of Eritreans was linked largely to agricultural processes in that region, not necessarily to political violence.

While these examples are useful for understanding the larger debate about the official and unofficial meanings of a refugee, there should be more contributions from geographers along two separate but interconnected angles: *1) the refugee process as a political/institutional/exclusive/selective one where refugees are controlled and often marginalized in the humanitarian process of resettlement and integration in host societies and; 2) an increased humanistic and ethnographic approach studying these*

*processes as a human experience which the refugees negotiate over time and space.* The latter approach signals a call for a more ethnographic qualitative approach to geographical refugee research focusing on the stories and experiences of individual refugees and migrants. This approach has been discussed by others inside and outside of geography (McHugh 2000; V. A. Lawson 2000; Ghorashi 2008).

As it is evident from this chapter, contributions from political geography focusing on issues of migration and mobility are fairly "new". And while contributions on refugee issues in particular can be found over the last two decades, they are often restricted to very specific regions or refugee situations, such as those which took place in the Horn of Africa. In this regard there have not been numerous critiques leveled against political geographical works dealing with migration and refugee processes. As one can see from Spencer (2003) and Hollifield (2008), discussions about the role and relationship between the State and processes of migration are growing and becoming more relevant as the world becomes "smaller". There have, however, been a number critiques within the sub-field of population geography which call for more theoretical and political works on migration processes (P. White and Jackson 1995; E. Graham and Boyle 2001). Answering this call are scholars doing work in the burgeoning field of feminist geopolitics (Dowler and Sharp 2001; Hyndman 2001; Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake 2004; Grewal 2005). These works, especially in the case of Hyndman and Grewal, discuss issues of mobility and migration from a feminist perspective, stressing the very gendered nature of certain migration processes and policies.

With a few exceptions of works that attempt to bridge the gap between broader theoretical processes and qualitative humanistic ethnographic research such as Lawson (1999), most geographers and other social scientists have yet to find a balance between these two approaches. So while geopolitical and political economic discussions about migration are growing in response to earlier trends in migration studies and population geography, there are still a number of directions in which migration studies, especially refugee studies, can continue to grow within the discipline. Hopefully, more political geographers will enter into the discussions about migration and refugee issues, highlighting the importance of political trends, discourses, movements, policies, and conflicts upon movement and displacement.

# Chapter 3: Context of Iraqi Population Characteristics and Major Events of the Current Iraqi Refugee Crisis

The purpose of this section is to provide context for the social and demographic makeup of Iraq and to the events which brought Iraqi refugees to the United States beginning in 2006. One cannot understand the full extent of the Iraqi refugee crisis or their resettlement in the United States without understanding some of the social, cultural, and political characteristics of the country. Giving a detailed account, however, of the current Iraqi refugee crisis is beyond the scope of this work and has been well-documented by others (see Sassoon 2009; Amos 2010). This section will however give a synopsis of some of the main events which caused the large-scale movement of Iraqis within Iraq and to neighboring countries throughout the Middle East as well as some of the aspects and debates surrounding the so-called ethno-sectarian divisions in Iraq which are often cited as one of the main reasons for large-scale displacement in Iraq.

## 3.1 Population Characteristics, Displacement, and Ethno-Sectarian Violence in Iraq

The American-led 2003 invasion of Iraq is not the first instance causing large-scale refugee migration within the country. Due to multiple international conflicts since 1980 (the Iran-Iraq War from 1980-88, the first American-led Gulf War in 1991, and the recently ended American-led military endeavor starting in 2003) along with other internal skirmishes over the years, large segments of the Iraqi population have either fled from

their homes as refugees crossing international borders or have become internally displaced peoples (IDP's) within Iraq.

One important instance of refugee movement in Iraq prior to 2005 is the Kurdish refugee crisis beginning in 1991. After the Iraqi army had been expelled from Kuwait by coalition forces in Operation Desert Storm, a variety of groups used this moment of weakness of Saddam Hussein's power to attempt to overturn the government. The first uprisings to be crushed by Saddam's forces however, were in the south of the country and were primarily Shiite acts of revolt. After defeating the Shiite uprisings in the south, Saddam moved his forces to the north where Kurdish revolts were taking place. The brutal tactics of Saddam's Republican Guards forced many Kurds out of the cities and into the mountains along the Iran and Turkey border. Because of previous large-scale attacks on Kurdish populations, it was not just Kurdish fighters to flee the cities, but also many civilians who feared for their lives. Despite the actions of the United Nations in passing UN Resolution 688 which approved humanitarian assistance to the Kurds who had fled and the imposition of Iraqi no-fly zones north of the 36th parallel (fearing another attack on Kurdish civilian populations), nearly 2 million Kurds were displaced in a matter of days and an estimated one million had reached the Turkish border alone (Stansfield 2007, 134; Tripp 2007, 248). Even after the central government was satisfied that the Kurdish uprisings in the north were over, Saddam imposed a domestic economic embargo on the Kurdish population denying them economic interaction with Arab Iraq (Stansfield 2007, 135).

This is only a single example not only of refugee movement inside and outside of Iraq but also of government engineered ethno-sectarian tensions within Iraq, which is now cited as one of the main causes of refugee migration there in the current Iraqi refugee crisis. There is an ongoing debate, however, as to whether current ethno-sectarian tensions in Iraq are real or perceived or simply play a marginal role in the ongoing violence within the country. Understanding the demographic makeup of Iraq and some of the history of its population is key to understanding what is happening in that country today and why so many Iraqis have thus been resettled in the United States.

Estimates of Iraq's overall population today range from 28.9 to 32 million people although there has not been an official census taken in Iraq since 1997 and that census is contested and considered to be of little value to demographers and the Iraqi population at large (Anderson and Stansfield 2009). The main reason the 1997 census is viewed as inadequate is largely because data was not compiled (and thus not included) for three of the country's northern provinces. Taking this into consideration, the 1987 census was the last complete census carried out by the Iraqi government. This census, however, as are all censuses conducted during the rule of the Ba'ath regime, is also considered to be of little use due to the government's tampering with the data and demographic engineering of whole regions and cities. With this in mind, the last census which is considered to be useful for demographers is the 1957 census which was conducted prior to the fall of the Hashemite monarchy in 1958. Finding and making

sense of population statistics for the various ethnic and religious groups in Iraq, however, is challenging and always controversial.

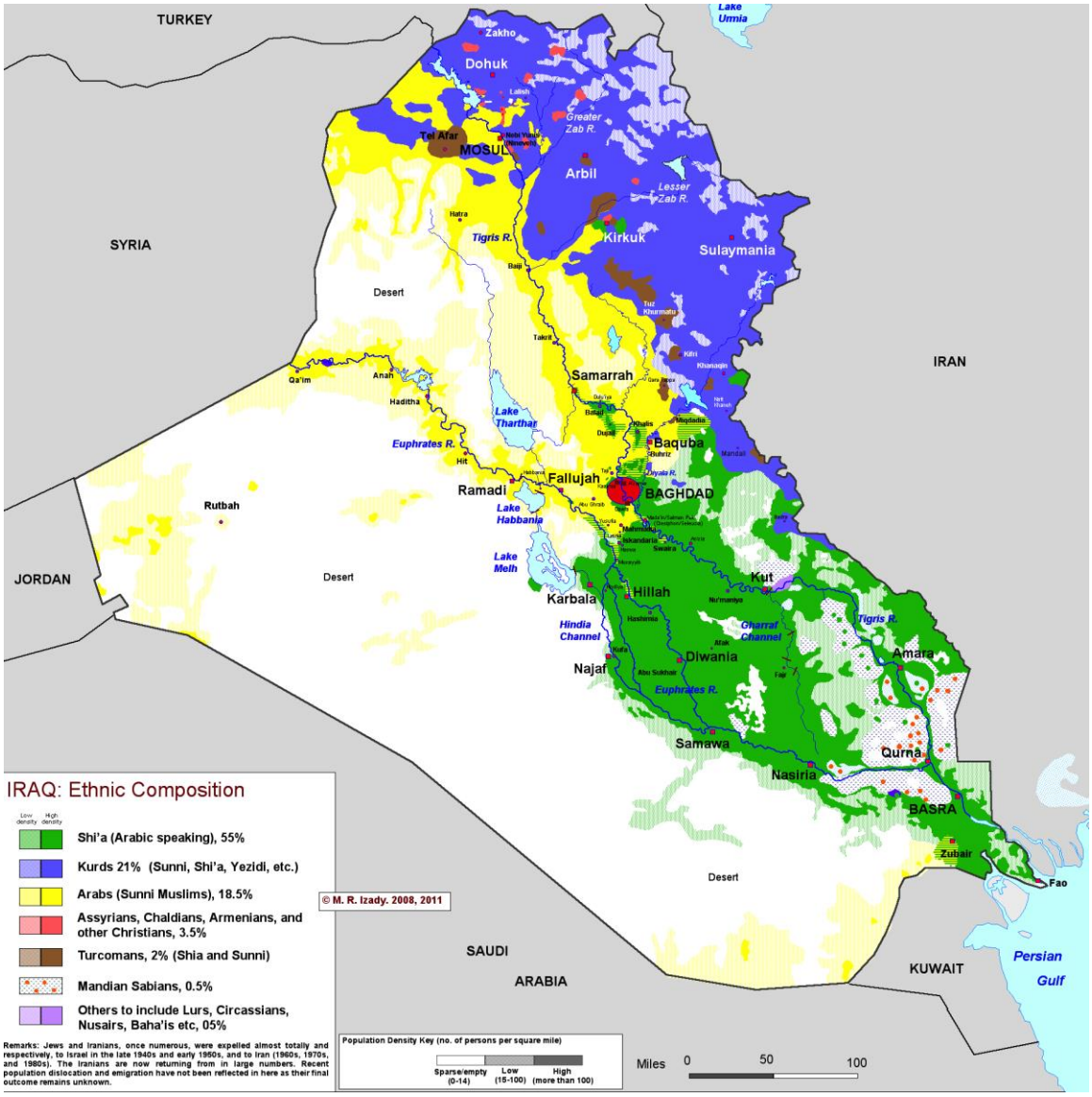
In Iraq ethnic groups are primarily clustered into four main groupings: Arabs, Kurds, Turkmen, and Chaldo-Assyrians. Even these groupings do not encompass the extent of the various minority groups within Iraq which include, albeit on a very small scale: Syriacs, Armenians, Sabaen-Mandeans, Yazidis, and Bahais. While population statistics are not presently available for the different ethnic and sectarian groupings in Iraq, many analysts do estimate on the numbers. Looking at the various ethnicities within Iraq, the US government estimates that Arabs make up approximately 75-80 per cent of the population while Kurds account for 15-20 per cent[5]. Turkmen, Chaldo-Assyrian, and other minority groups make up an estimated 5 per cent of the overall population. According to Stansfield, although Turkmen scholars put the Turkmen population at 10-15 per cent of the total, it is more likely that the actual Turkmen population is under 5 per cent (2007, 71). In terms of religious groups within Iraq, it is estimated that Muslims compose about 97 per cent of the population with approximately 60-65 per cent of those Muslims being Shiite and 32-37 per cent being comprised of Sunnis. The Christian community in Iraq is rather small and becoming smaller due to the ongoing violence. It is estimated that the number of Christians in Iraq number no more than one million although the number now may be far lower due to large scale refugee outmigration of Christian populations. Within the Christian community, the two main groups are the

[5] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/iz.html

Chaldeans and the Assyrians with as much as 70 per cent of Iraq's Christians belonging to the Chaldean Catholic Church (Stansfield 2007, 73).

Ethno-sectarian is a word often used when describing Iraq. In this work, it is used broadly and inclusively as the intricate associations and linkages between and among groups in Iraq makes it misleading to use only one term or the other. The term multi-

Figure 3.1 Map of Iraqi ethnic groups




*Source: Columbia Univ. Gulf/2000 project, http://gulf2000.columbia.edu/maps.shtml*

ethnic, for example, disregards the existence of different religions such as Islam and Christianity. The term multi-ethnic also ignores different sects within religions such as the differences between Sunni and Shiite Muslims or between Chaldean and Assyrian

Christians. This becomes a bit more complicated when one considers that those members within a specific ethnicity may also belong to different religious sects. This is exemplified by the fact that 80 percent of Kurds are Sunni while approximately 15 percent are Shiite (Stansfield 2007, 217). The challenges of finding a viable and lasting solution for the future of Iraq are more easily understood when considering the diversity and complexity of the Iraqi population. Lastly, it should be noted that when discussing various ethnic groups and/or religious sects in this chapter, they are in no way meant to be conveyed as homogenous, stable groups with a uniform set of characteristics. In fact, the different ethnic and religious groups in Iraq are fluid, dynamic, often changing and differing politically, socially, and culturally even within a single group.

Understanding the ethno-sectarian divisions in Iraq is important for understanding the broader Iraqi refugee crisis as it is these divisions that are often blamed for the widespread refugee outmigration from Iraq as well as the internal displacement within the country. Large-scale refugee movement was expected and warned against during the lead up to the war in 2003. Either because of fears of biological or chemical weapons use by Saddam Hussein's regime, violence between US and Iraqi forces, or possible sectarian strife, millions of dollars of aid and resources were sent to Iraqi border regions and international aid organizations increased their efforts to prepare for an eventual "flood" of refugees across the border. This flood never materialized and contrary to the worries of many analysts and organizations, many thousands of Iraqis began to actually return to Iraq who had been away for years for fear of reprisals from Saddam's Ba'ath regime

(Sassoon 2009, 11). Refugee movement out of Iraq and internally did not begin in earnest until the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque in February of 2006. One of the holiest sites for Shia' Muslims in the world, the mosque sits in Samarra, less than 100 miles from Baghdad. The bombing of the Al-Askari mosque was a watershed moment in the increasing violence between the Sunni and Shia' sects in Iraq and for the large-scale outflow of refugees from Iraq into neighboring countries such as Syria and Jordan. A report from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) underscored the importance of this event, stating: "The Samarra bombing represents one of the most significant catalysts for migration in recent Iraqi history. The magnitude and nature of the displacement that followed still pose serious humanitarian and developmental challenges for the country today" (IOM 2011).

Even before the bombing of the Al-Askari mosque, reports of increasing sectarian divisions were prevalent in the media (see for example Tavernise 2005). In the wake of the Al-Askari bombings, however, sectarian tensions intensified and became a focal point not only for the media but also for policy makers, human rights groups, and academic scholars. It is debated, however, as to whether the current tensions between sects and ethnicities in Iraq is real or perceived, ingrained or manufactured. The discourse over the political future of Iraq revolves primarily around this dual issue of perceived ethnic and sectarian divisions within the country. Early on during the American-led invasion of Iraq, one popular strategy for Iraq's future which was advocated by analysts and high level government officials in the U.S. was to make Iraq a federal democracy along ethnic

lines, dividing the country into three states mirroring the vilayets (provinces) of the Ottoman period: a predominantly Kurdish state in the north, a central Sunni-dominated state, and a Shi'ite state in the south of the country (Biden Jr. 2006; Joseph and O'Hanlon 2007). This viewpoint was strongly debated as it was based on the notion that those three regions of Iraq are comprised of stable, mostly homogenous groups (Cole 2004; Williams and Simpson 2008; Cordesman 2006). Not only does the idea disregard the existence of other minority groups within the country but it also discounts the notion that these regions and the populations residing within them are quite heterogeneous. Furthermore, the approach disregards other possible demographic ramifications such as the eventual need for major population transfers. To be sure, demographic considerations play a major role in the future of Iraqi unity and attention to history shows how government sponsored demographic engineering, large-scale migratory patterns, or foreign military intervention can not only change the demographic composition of a city or region but also fuel ethno-sectarian divisions.

It needs to be stated here that over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries during Ottoman rule Iraq became a majority Shi'a country ruled by an Ottoman Sunni minority (Cole 2003). Throughout the remainder of Iraq's history, until the fall of Saddam's regime, this power structure remained firmly in place. This imbalance of power has been a historical source for tensions between Muslim sects in the country. This point can be exemplified by looking at the structure of Iraq's military throughout the middle decades of the twentieth century. While recruits for the Iraqi army during these

decades were made up primarily of Arab Shiites, the officer corps consisted almost wholly of Arab Sunnis. The military thus became the main mode of political and social progression for Sunni Arabs at this time (Stansfield 2007, 83). Moreover, the military played a large part in carrying out ethnic violence and forced displacement in the following decades.

Additionally, as stated above, Arab Sunni governments in Iraq have taken part in the demographic engineering of whole regions and cities for political purposes since the 1930's. Whether to subdue recalcitrant populations, crush rising opposition movements, takeover fertile agricultural or oil-rich land, or to attempt to "Arabize" minority non-Arab populations, these practices of displacement have been ongoing even after the American-led invasion in 2003. One of the first instances of Arabization in the post-WWI period involved the northern regions of Iraq, especially the city of Kirkuk. Outlined in detail in Anderson and Stansfield, the Arabization of Kirkuk underwent five successive phases all of which were an attempt to increase the Arab population in the city relative to the Kurdish population. This would mean the government could lay claim to Kirkuk in the face of Kurdish assertions that the city is predominantly Kurdish and should be incorporated into a future independent Kurdistan (2009, 30–42). The main cause of importance of Kirkuk for the Iraqi government and subsequently, for all parties laying claim to Kirkuk is the vast oil reserves found there. The first phase of Arabization thus took place shortly after independence when Kirkuk became one of Iraq's most important economic centers due to its immense oil reserves. By 1935, Iraq had become one of the

world's major exporters of oil and the monarchy, aware of ongoing Kurdish hostility due to a succession of Kurdish revolts, "moved to socially engineer Kirkuk in order to weaken the Kurdish presence there" (Anderson and Stansfield 2009, 32).

Policies of Arabization in the 1930's were just the beginning of a long series of events in the demographic engineering of Kirkuk and other regions which were comprised of a combination of natural resources and diverse ethnic and religious populations. Anderson and Stansfield describe the intensity during the second phase of Arabization between 1963-1968 stating:

> Kurdish neighborhoods in Kirkuk were demolished; Kurdish villages near the city were destroyed; Kurds in Dibis were expelled and replaced with Arab tribes, in some thirty-five villages; similar numbers of villages were Arabized in Sargaran and Kandinawa districts; Kurds working in the oil industry were expelled or transferred outside the province; Arabs were brought into the local police force; names of schools and streets were changed from Kurdish to Arabic; and a large-scale militarization of the province was undertaken, including the establishment of security zones around oil facilities (2009, 35-36)

Although it is generally thought that the oppression and marginalization of the Kurdish population was carried out primarily by Saddam Hussein and the Ba'ath regime, these examples highlight that Arabization policies had been taking place at least since Iraq's independence in 1932.

Unfortunately, displacement policies did not ease after 1968 or after Saddam Hussein took power in 1979. As Cohen states, forced displacement during Saddam's regime was one of "deliberate state policy" (Cohen 2008, 302). One report goes so far as to claim that, "In Iraq, over the last thirty years, there has never been a time when one

group or another was not being expelled from their homes" (Fawcett and Tanner 2002, 1). One Human Rights Watch Report documents the expulsion of ethnic minorities from areas of northern Iraq between 1991 and 2002 (Mufti and Bouckaert 2003). This report is similarly troublesome. Estimates of those Iraqis forcibly displaced between 1991 and 2002 due to Arabization policies range from 58,000 to 140,000. These estimates include not only Kurds but also Turkmen and Assyrians who were expelled from their homes (Mufti and Bouckaert 2003, 4). Changing the demographic makeup of Kirkuk and surrounding areas was not carried out only by the forcible expulsion of people from their homes but later by Decree 199 which was passed by Iraq's Revolutionary Command Council which "allowed" non-Arab Iraqis over eighteen years of age to change their official ethnic identity by applying to register as Arabs (Mufti and Bouckaert 2003, 6). Many ethnic minorities who refused to officially change their ethnicity faced harassment by the Iraqi police until they either left on their own accord or until they were forcibly expelled from their homes and moved to specific locations inside of Iraq. These attempts at changing the demographic and ethnic makeup of areas in Iraq since the country's independence for political purposes has aided in creating longstanding controversies over population statistics as well as fueling sectarian divisions. Aside from these attempts however, many other theories exist as to the reasons for the current ethno-sectarian tension and violence in post-Saddam Iraq.

One of the dominant approaches for explaining the current violence in Iraq, especially among policy-makers and analysts in Washington, is to simply, "impose a

primordial template onto the political and societal complexities of the situation" (Dodge 2007, 24). Proponents of this argument insist that there are three sectarian communities in Iraq (Sunni, Shiite, and Kurds) which are mostly homogenous, and have been forced into geographical proximity with one another under a Sunni authoritarian dictatorship, and have been and always will be hostile towards each other due primarily to long held sectarian or ethnic hatred. This argument, however influential it may be, essentializes Iraqi society and culture as a static and unchanging entity. The ethno-sectarian fighting occurring in Iraq today is most likely not caused by long held antipathies between homogenous groups. As stressed earlier, the various ethnic and sectarian groups in Iraq are far from homogenous. Nor is the current violence due to any one single explanation such as this, but is in all probability due to a combination and merging of different events, processes, and developments.

While many analysts, journalists, and observers have blamed the United States' invasion of Iraq for the current ethno-sectarian violence, this event cannot be held solely accountable either. Other forces, events, and processes must be and are offered in explaining the violence reported in Iraq on an almost daily basis. First, a number of scholars and analysts point to the legacy of colonialism in Iraq as being a cause of tensions within the country which are still present today (Dodge 2003; R. Khalidi 2004). Certainly the imposition of artificial boundaries in the creation of the Iraqi state as well as other effects of post-World War I British colonialism had dire consequences for the

future of the country. The creation of the state of Iraq by the British leads to what Stansfield calls, "the artificiality debate". Stansfield describes this debate as follows:

> The territory of Iraq, so this argument would tend to go, was brought together in the aftermath of World War I because of the geopolitical and economic needs of victorious Western powers, and most notably those of Britain. From a constellation of dissociated peoples living in different geographical spaces, the modern state of Iraq was doomed to succumb to various manifestations of authoritarian rule because this was the only mechanism by which the fractious country could be held together (Stansfield 2007, 28-29).

This argument thus presupposes that the various ethnic and religious groups in Iraq cannot live together without an authoritarian ruler holding them together and therefore, when Saddam Hussein's regime fell in 2003, there was nothing left to keep the groups from competing for power. These groups of people had been living in geographical proximity to one another long before British colonialism, however. The difference implied in this argument is that for the first time under the British, the population was brought together under the rule of a foreign-imposed central government located in Baghdad, the Hashemite monarchy. Moreover, the Iraqi population was expected to adhere to the new rules of governance which were to serve British economic interests and, moreover, which shattered previous notions of government, society, and identity among the population at large. As Tripp states, "It (the new British regime of power) demanded new forms of identity and new strategies to exploit the opportunities that presented themselves" (Tripp 2007, 30).

It wasn't simply the rules of governance that the Iraqis were subjected to by the new British regime of power, however. After the mandate was passed to piece together

the three Ottoman provinces of Iraq into a single country under a central government, there was, not surprisingly, an armed revolt by the Iraqis against British forces which broke out in June of 1920. British forces crushed the revolt in what can be seen as a prelude to the "shock and awe" military power of the Americans over 80 years later. While tens of thousands of British ground troops were deployed to help squelch the revolt, the British military also relied heavily on airpower. In Gregory's discussion of the rebellion and the British response, he states, "Britain deployed a formidable arsenal, against which the tribespeople had little or no defense. There were pulverizing bombing raids, heavy artillery bombardments, and gas attacks…and by the end of these counter-insurgency operations more than 9,000 people had been killed" (2004, 148).

This revolt and the British response to it is also cited in a letter written to *The Times* by T.E. Lawrence in August of 1920. In this article Lawrence, the British army officer known as Lawrence of Arabia and famous for his work *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, derides the British for their handling of foreign policy in the Middle East concerning specifically the revolt in Iraq. In this "Report on Mesopotamia", Lawrence starts by stating, "The people of England have been led in Mesopotamia into a trap from which it will be hard to escape with dignity and honour." Strikingly, he ends the article with some important and familiar questions:

> We say we are in Mesopotamia to develop it for the benefit of the world. All experts say that the labour supply is the ruling factor in its development. How far will the killing of ten thousand villagers and townspeople this summer hinder the production of wheat, cotton, and oil? How long will we permit millions of pounds, thousands of imperial troops, and tens of

> thousands of Arabs to be sacrificed on behalf of colonial administration which can benefit nobody but its administrators? (Lawrence 1920)

It is not difficult to see the similarities between Lawrence's descriptions of the British response to the rebellion and that of the American military later in the century and in 2003. Many would argue that the processes of British colonialism in Iraq have continued into the present through modern forms of colonialism. It is to these arguments that we will turn next.

While British colonialism in Iraq is often cited in discussions of the country's ongoing violence, other authors point to continuing forms of colonialism or imperialism, referring primarily to the actions of the United States in Iraq before and after 2003 (Ali 2003; Gregory 2004; R. Khalidi 2004). These authors argue that even before the US-led invasion in 2003, America was playing an imperial-like role in Iraq. The invasion in 2003 was simply an extension of previous American actions in the country and one which solidified it, for these authors, as an imperial power in the Middle East. While the US may have been involved in the politics and economy of Iraq before 2003, America certainly became even more heavily involved in political, social, and economic issues in the country after the invasion as it was a primary player in the formation of Iraq's new government.

The 2003 invasion and the events that occurred afterward are often viewed through the lenses of failed American policy and military planning with an emphasis that the US went into Iraq with little understanding of and unprepared for the cultural,

political, and societal complexities of the country. Many have criticized and blamed America's planning (or lack of planning) in the lead up to the war for the current violence in Iraq (Cole 2003; Sidahmed 2007, 79). Writing about the influential Sadrist movement not long after the initial invasion of Iraq, Middle East historian Juan Cole writes, "in planning the war on Iraq, the American Defense Departments and intelligence organizations appear to have been unaware that millions of Iraqi Shi'ites had joined a militant and puritanical movement dedicated to the establishment of an Iran-style Islamic Republic in Iraq…" (Cole 2003, 543). Cole's article illustrates first, that the US government may indeed have been unprepared for the complex sectarian dynamics which led to the violence which began and intensified after the invasion. Secondly, Cole's article highlights the fact that many of the movements and groups which have since taken part in the ethno-sectarian violence were not created in a vacuum but instead were in existence and organized long before the fall of Saddam. This is not meant to evoke the idea, however, that these groups have been organized and waiting to inflict violence upon one another at the first given opportunity. While tensions have existed in varying degrees between certain ethnicities and sects within Iraq (at times more than others), Cole argues that the ethno-sectarian violence observed in Iraq today is due more to the economic and political influence in Iraq by the US government. As Cole states, "Iraq's problems have for the most part derived from the extreme concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a succession of minority cliques-a state of affairs that the Americans may be in the process of fostering once again by their extreme economic liberalization policies"

(Cole 2004, 31). Although Cole argues that accumulation of the country's wealth and power in the hands a small minority group is a primary reason for the current problems Iraq faces, one cannot discount the effects of 30 years of authoritarian dictatorship.

The strategies and effects of Saddam Hussein's regime upon the Iraqi population are well-documented in Makiya's landmark work, *Republic of Fear* (1998). This work illustrates the way Hussein used fear and violence as a primary tactic in securing control over the population. Further, many of Hussein's policies have directly affected the existence of ethno-sectarian violence seen in Iraq today. According to Sidahmed, the effects of Saddam's regime on the current situation are two-fold. First, Saddam's strategy of suppressing all organizations and movements that were not explicitly tied to the Iraqi Baath Party meant that there were few, if any, alternative groups to play a role in post-Saddam Iraqi politics. As Sidahmed states, "Years of systematic oppression and prohibition of independent political or organizational activity resulted in the gradual destruction of national and secular platforms, whether political parties, trades unions, or other civil society organizations" (2007, 74). Many of the religious groups and organizations were able to continue to exist, albeit under circumstances of high levels of oppression and discrimination, and became some of the only alternatives for political mobilization during Saddam's rule. Along with the continued existence of religious organizations, the ideological approach of Saddam's regime became overtly more religious after the failed invasion of Kuwait in 1990 and the onset of the devastating UN sanctions which lasted for more than a decade. With the subsequent drop in Saddam's

popularity as a result of these events, the regime began to employ religion, Islam, as a way to regain legitimacy and popularity. Throughout the 1990's and until the 2003 invasion of Iraq, there was a growing tendency among the Iraqi population towards Islam due to the hardships of the time. Religion thus started to play a greater role not only within the political ideology of the regime, but in the lives of the population at large (Sidahmed 2007, 75–76).

Alongside the importance of the 30 years of authoritarian rule in Iraq is the issue of the country's vast reserves of natural resources. The interest of imperial powers such as Britain and the United States in Iraq has since the First World War revolved partially around the vast amount of oil the country possesses. A number of authors have drawn attention to the role of oil in influencing the US to invade Iraq in 2003 (R. Khalidi 2004; Jhaveri 2004). It is important to point out, however, that Iraq's oil wealth also played a major role internally in shifting the political culture within Iraq in the 1970's. The exponential growth in oil revenues in the 1970's allowed Saddam's regime to rely much less on tax revenue and also to employ much of the population with government jobs. This created a greater dependency of the population upon the central government for their health, safety, and welfare (Stansfield 2007, 95–96). Tripp identifies the importance of the political economy of oil in Iraq as well, illustrating its effect and influence on the relationships between those in control of state revenues and various sectors of the population (Tripp 2007, 6).

Those relationships are playing out currently along ethnic and sectarian lines as specific regions and/or provinces in Iraq which are either majority Kurdish, Shiite, or Sunni are calling for control over the natural resources present in their specific areas. One example of this, reported in the New York Times, is currently taking place in Anbar province, traditionally a majority Sunni province, where local Sunni politicians are challenging the central government's control and expropriation of a natural gas field in the province. As the Times reporters write, "The conflict — which pits a Sunni province against a mostly Shiite administration — adds a new battle line in one of the country's most divisive and volatile issues: who controls the vast untapped oil and gas reserves that are necessary to restart Iraq's crippled economy" (Leland and Ali 2010). Similar conflicts have been playing out in the Kurdish dominated north and the Shiite south and is now a major issue confronting the central government.

While oil wealth may have played a part in creating a dependence of the general population upon Saddam's regime in the 1970's, the UN sanctions on the country played a much different role. The UN sanctions which were imposed on Iraq from 1990-2003 created a reliance among sectors of the population upon their affiliated religious and/or ethnic communities and invariably played a part in the strengthening of ethno-sectarian identities and thus in the current ethno-sectarian violence observed in the country. The sanctions of Iraq had dire consequences on much of the Iraqi population and by 1995, it was estimated that approximately 20 per cent of the population was living in conditions of extreme poverty (Stansfield 2007, 140). Certainly, the sanctions were influential in the

deteriorating levels of nutrition among the population and more generally among their welfare and well-being. Due to the dismal conditions during the era of the sanctions, the population was forced to rely more on groups and organizations affiliated with religion or ethnicity rather than the central government, to which they were accustomed (Sidahmed 2007, 76). This point may have facilitated not only the allegiances among sectors of the populations and specific organizations, but may have also aided in increasing the power of those groups.

A final explanation as to why intense ethno-sectarian violence is occurring at this specific moment has to do with theories relating to state collapse. Even before the US-led invasion in 2003, the Iraqi state was on the verge of collapse due to two devastating wars and debilitating international sanctions which led to rampant crime throughout the country. After the fall of Saddam Hussein's regime, the US-led coalition was unable to gain control of the country or to instill a legitimate or accepted central government. According to Dodge, this lack of reliable administrative state institutions can have dire consequences on a population. In the aftermath of state collapse, "Politics becomes both international and highly local…public goods, services, economic subsistence, and ultimately physical survival are to be found through ad hoc and informal channels" (Dodge 2007, 26). These channels, in the aftermath of state collapse in Iraq, have led to membership and affiliation among broad sectors of the population with "industrial strength" criminal gangs, independent militias, and organizations of the insurgency

whose main purpose was to fight the US-led occupation and the Iraqi government (Dodge 2007, 31-32).

These combined various historical events and processes: the legacy of colonialism, decades of minority Sunni control over the country, three wars, 30 years of authoritarian dictatorship, extreme state violence against large sectors of the population as a form of control and coercion, debilitating UN sanctions, rising Islamist tendencies, infighting over natural resources, foreign military intervention, and a collapsed state which has yet to be fully reestablished, have all played an indelible role in structuring and restructuring collective societal identities in Iraq. When these characteristics are linked with specific and significant demographic trends such as an increasingly large youth population, increasing urbanization and urban poverty, extremely high mortality rates due to violence, and large-scale refugee outmigration after 2005, the future of Iraq appears bleak and one begins to get a sense of why ethno-sectarian violence continues in Iraq today and finally, why there has been little to no return migration among Iraqi refugees since 2005.

## 3.2 The Beginnings of a Refugee Crisis in Iraq

### 3.2.1 Internal Displacement in Iraq after the 2003 invasion

After the al-Askari bombing in 2006 and the rise in sectarian violence, the war in Iraq saw its first major flows of refugees, both within the country and across borders.

Major internal displacement was a precursor to large numbers of refugees crossing borders to neighboring countries not long afterward. Neither internal displacement nor refugee outflows were a new phenomenon for Iraq however. Even before the 2003 invasion, Iraq had one of the largest populations of internally displaced peoples (IDP's) and refugee populations in the world (Fawcett and Tanner 2002; Cohen 2008). According to the United States Committee for Refugees and Immigrants' (USCRI) World Refugee Survey-Iraq in 2002 it was estimated that there were approximately one million internally displaced people in Iraq and an additional one to two million Iraqis living outside of the country due to a fear of persecution. Out of this one to two million however, only about 400,000 were formally recognized as refugees or asylum seekers (USCRI 2003). Reasons for the high number of internally displaced even before 2003 was, as explained above, largely due to the Arabization policies of the state. Fawcett and Tanner, however, take this reasoning a bit further stating that internal displacement goes to "the heart of the struggle for power in Iraq, to the fundamental issues of Iraqi politics: water, land, oil, minority and majority rights, citizenship and national allegiance" (Fawcett and Tanner 2002, 42).

The struggle for power in Iraq presently mirrors many of these same issues and internal displacement remains a serious issue, even more serious after 2006. Sassoon categorizes three main phases of internal displacement after the 2003 invasion: from May 2003 to February 2006 when the al-Askari mosque was bombed; February 2006 to the summer of 2007; and lastly, from the "surge" of American troops which led to a decrease

in violence until 2009 (the time of writing of his book) (Sassoon 2009, 10). Displacement during the initial phase was caused simultaneously by US-led campaigns against Iraqi insurgents (such as the siege of Falluja in November 2004), early tensions between ethno-sectarian groups, and returning Iraqi refugees (who had left Iraq during Saddam's era) who found their homes either destroyed, taken over by other families, or who simply found the situation in Iraq to be too unstable to stay in their original home (Sassoon 2009, 10-11).

Early ethno-sectarian tensions were taking place between sects and even within them. After the fall of the Ba'ath regime, power vacuums arose to try to win over followers among the Iraqi population. As Cole states, "When the Ba'ath fell on April 9, 2003, Shi'ite militias seemed suddenly to emerge and take control of many urban areas in the south of the country, as well as in the desperately poor slums of East Baghdad" (2003, 544). Winning the power struggle among those Shi'ite militias that were emerging after the fall of Saddam was the Sadr movement. A puritanical and xenophobic group known for its popularity among the youth and poor Shi'ites in Iraq, the Sadr movement and militias played a major role in not only increasing anti-American rhetoric and distrust, but also in the Sunni-Shi'a violence in the country. By 2005, sectarian violence was growing worse, culminating in the bombing of the al-Askari mosque by Sunni militants. From this event the second phase of internal displacement (according to Sassoon) begins as sectarian violence becomes the main cause of forced movement within the country. This phase is markedly different from the first not only in the increased level of violence and

sheer numbers of those fleeing their homes, but primarily by the notion that the displacement at this time was no longer temporary (as it often was in the earlier years of the war with many returning to their homes after fighting had subsided). The scale of the violence and mistrust between sects was so polarizing that residents began selling their homes or fleeing with the realization that they may never be able to return (Sassoon 2009, 12). The scale of sectarian violence in this "second phase" and its effects on internal displacement at the time is highlighted by al-Khalidi and Tanner's report, "Sectarian Violence: Radical Groups Drive Internal Displacement in Iraq" (2006). The authors of the report claim that there are five main categories of people who were displaced due to sectarian violence at this time (2006): 1)Sunnis being expelled from Shi'a areas; 2)Shi'a from Sunni areas; 3)Arabs (Sunni and Shi'a being expelled from Kurdish areas; 4)minority groups from Sunni and Shi'a areas and; 5)Sunni Arabs from conflict areas (A. Al-Khalidi and Tanner 2006, 21–25).

After 2007, sectarian (and overall) violence subsided in Iraq due largely to increased US ground troops, alliances between the US and some Sunni tribes, and to a six month break in military actions by the Sadr militias (Sassoon 2009, 13). It is at this point that what Sassoon characterizes as the third phase of internal displacement begins. It ends, however in 2009, when his book was published. Since 2009, internal displacement in Iraq has not improved and remains a contentious and challenging issue. One report, published in October 2011 by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council) has a heading which reads, "Response still

centered on return despite increasing IDP demands for local integration" (IDMC 2011). This point highlights that the issue of permanent internal displacement remains a realistic one within the country and the Iraqi Ministry of Displacement and Migration (MoDM) would do well to put as much effort in integrating the displaced into their new towns and cities rather than just focus on trying to aid the displaced to returning to places in which they either do not feel safe or whose home has been taken over by others in their absence.

Numbers of internally displaced at present (2012) are high, although (as are all population statistics in Iraq) highly contested as well. Statistics for displaced populations within Iraq are provided by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the UNHCR, the Iraqi MoDM, and the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Each group has different methods and guidelines for reporting on the numbers but those from the UNHCR and IOM (while quite disparate) are generally considered to be the most reliable. It is estimated that the total number of IDP's in Iraq is between 2,040,000 and 2,750,000. IOM reports that out of the 2,750,000, 1,660,000 have been internally displaced since 2006 (IOM 2011).

### 3.2.2 Movement across international borders after 2003

While internal displacement remains a serious problem inside of Iraq, many Iraqis began to cross international borders in 2005-2006 as well, giving them access (in theory, at least) to a legal and internationally recognized refugee status. Many Iraqis crossing into other Arab countries in the Middle East did not seek refugee status from United

Nations offices for various reasons which will be explored below. Additionally, however, Iraqis leaving the country found themselves in a challenging and somewhat unique refugee situation.

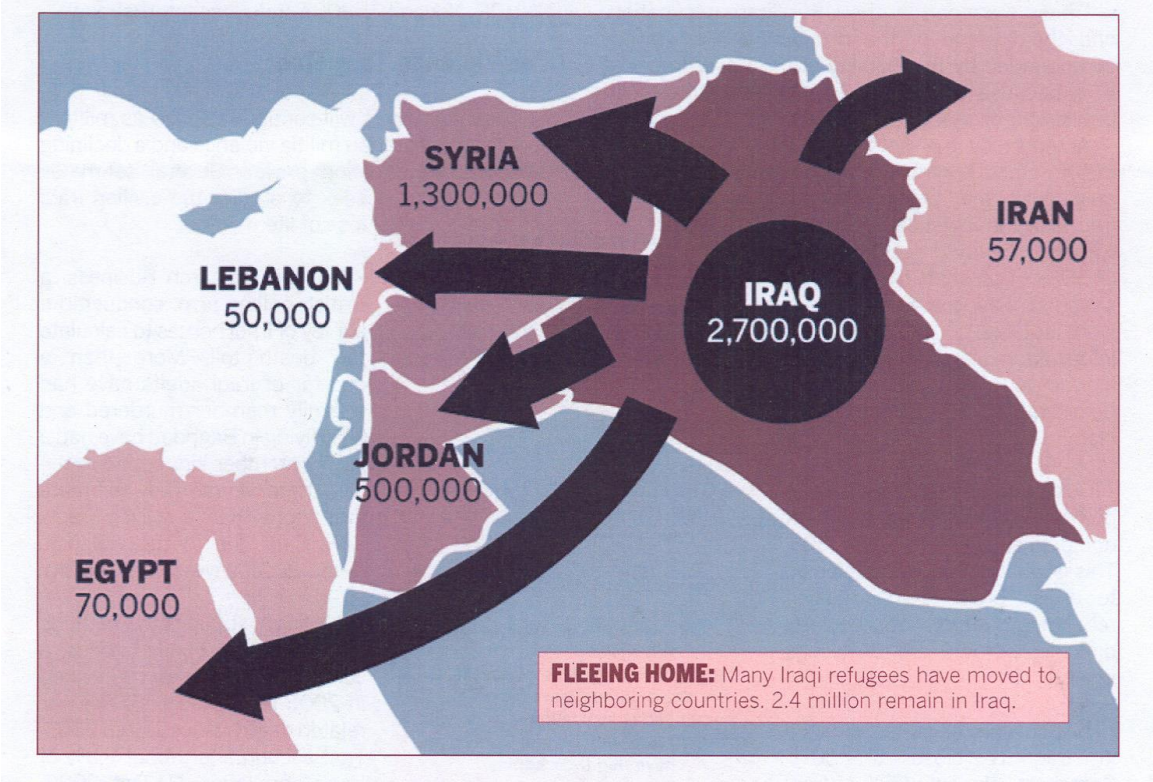
In the lead up to the 2003 American-led invasion of Iraq, the humanitarian regime prepared for a massive outflow of refugees from Iraq into neighboring countries. Numerous "experts" had predicted the invasion of Baghdad could create up to or more than a million refugees coming out of Iraq. The UNHCR and a myriad of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) made preparations to receive tens of thousands of Iraqis at camps along the borders of Jordan, Syria, and Iran. After the initial invasion, however, there was little to no refugee outmigration from Iraq. The expected "wave of humanity" was more like a trickle of a few hundred Palestinian-Iraqis, Iraqis from Tikrit, the hometown of Saddam Hussein, and other third country nationals fleeing the bombings. Why had there been such a major miscalculation on the part of the humanitarian organizations? As Chatty explains, for most Iraqis, the invasion by the American-led coalition was not viewed as one of liberation, but one of neo-colonialism. Additionally, she correctly notes, that the protracted Palestinian refugee issue is deeply ingrained in the minds of Iraqis and all those throughout the Arab world: that if you leave your home, when you return, you may not be able to get it back (Chatty 2003).

In 2005 and 2006, after the initial invasion was long over, as explained above, sectarian violence increased drastically throughout Iraq. This violence is what led to the massive outflow of Iraqi refugees that had been expected in 2003. The main receiving

locations of these refugees were Syria, especially Damascus and its surroundings suburbs and villages, Jordan, namely the cities of Amman and Irbid, and Lebanon. Others fled, albeit in smaller numbers, to Iran, Turkey, Egypt, the Gulf States and elsewhere in the Middle East. Focusing here on Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon (since that is where the vast majority of Iraqi refugees fled), the remainder of this section will review the numbers of Iraqis settling in these places, aspects of the situation in these countries for the Iraqis, and (lack of) return migration to Iraq.

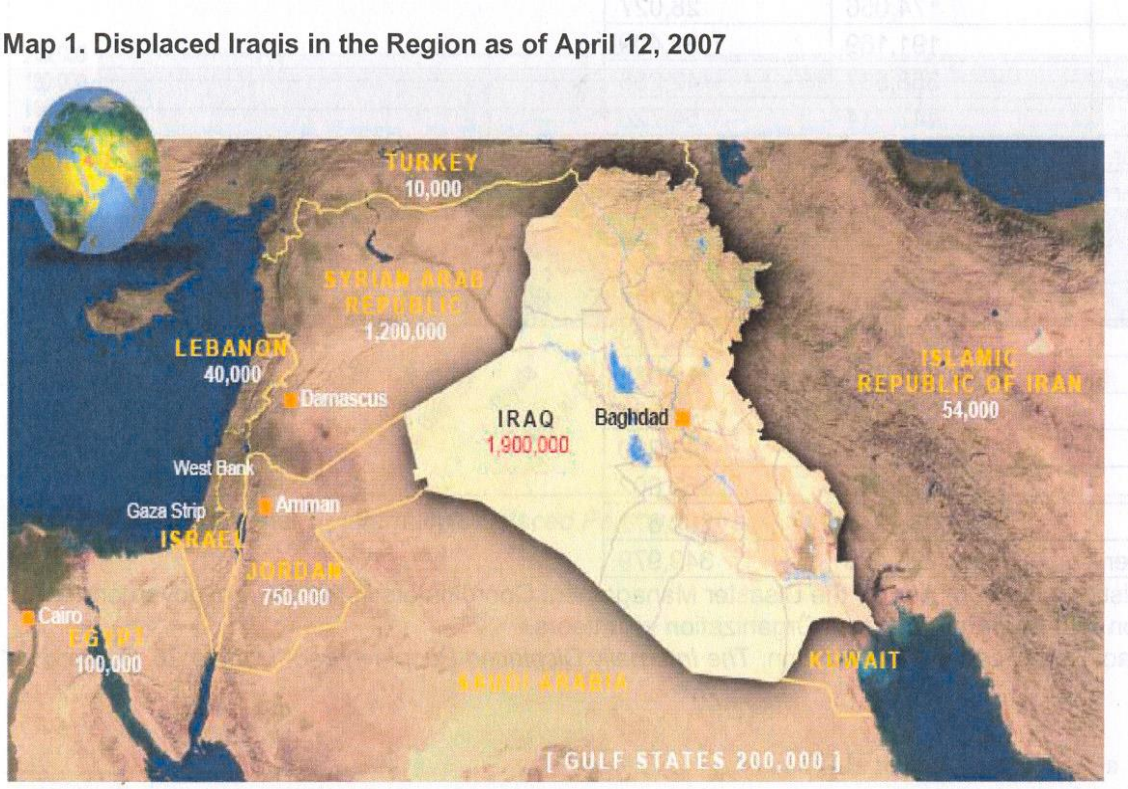
Once sectarian violence began in 2005 and especially after the bombing of the al-Askari mosque in February 2006, large numbers of Iraqis began to flow out of the country. The actual number of refugees in Syria, Jordan, (and to a lesser extent) Lebanon are highly contested. By early 2007, the UNHCR estimated that there were over one million Iraqi refugees in Syria, at least 500,000 in Jordan and close to 100,000 in Lebanon. Although cited by the UNHCR, these numbers were taken from host country estimates. These estimates provided by the governments of Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon were seemingly adopted without question by the media as well as numerous aid organizations working on the refugee crisis (see figure 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3 for examples).

Figure 3.1 Map of Iraqi Refugee Outmigration 2007




*Source:* American Friends Service Committee – www.afsc.org/iraq

Figure 3.2 Displaced Iraqis in the Middle East 2007

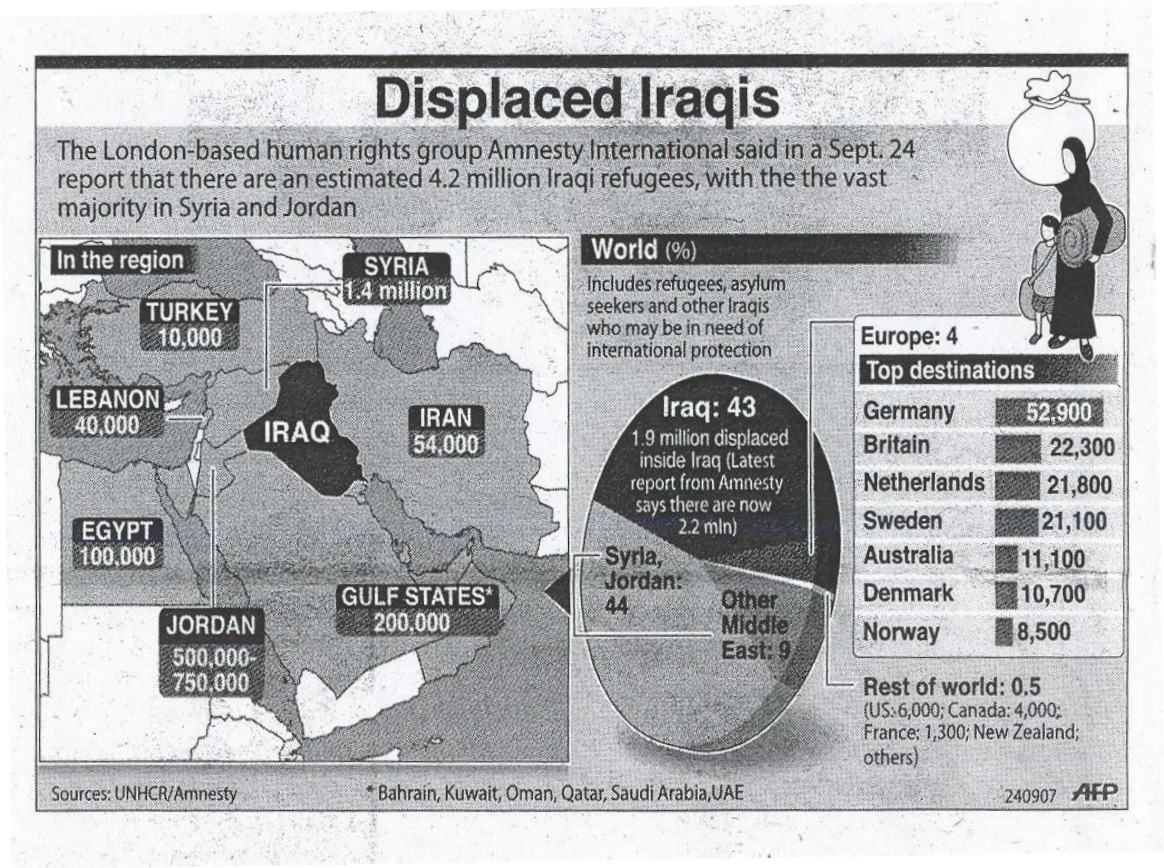



*Source*: Migration Policy Institute

While there was no doubt that an increasingly large number of people were steadily moving out of Iraq *and* being displaced within the country, these numbers stand in stark contrast to the actual numbers of Iraqis registering for refugee status at UN offices set up in Damascus, Amman, and elsewhere. In 2009, for example, when the Iraqi refugee crisis was still in full swing, the UNHCR posted their statistics on their website of the total numbers of Iraqis in countries in the Middle East and then the actual number of Iraqis being assisted in those countries by the UNHCR. According to this table, the total number of Iraqis in Syria was 1.2 million of which 236,000 had registered and were

being assisted by the UN. In Jordan, the discrepancy was stark as well: total in country was estimated at 450,000 while the number registered was only 65,000. Lebanon thus had an estimated 50,000 Iraqi refugees living in the country with only 12,000 legally registered as refugees (Marfleet and Chatty 2009).

Figure 3.3 Map of Iraqi refugee movement from USA Today 2007




*Source*: USA Today/Associated Press

Critics used this disparity to point out that the Iraqi refugee crisis was not as much of a "crisis" as the UN and the media had made it out to be and that the UNHCR and other NGO's on the ground working with the refugees (inside or outside of Iraq) were using it

as a bid to get more funds from potential donors. But why was there such a disparity in the first place? Was the Iraq refugee situation not as bad as it was made out to be?

According to Marfleet and Chatty's report for Oxford University's Refugee Studies Centre, there are a number of reasons for the disparity and the most accurate numbers of Iraqis in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon at the time were likely somewhere in the middle. One of the reasons it is so difficult to gauge the number of Iraqi refugees in countries throughout the Middle East is that there is a history of Iraqi migration to these countries (especially to Syria and Jordan) over the past few decades. Whether that migration be previous refugee migration or Iraqis migrating to cities like Amman and Damascus for work, business, or education, it makes it difficult to determine which Iraqis are there as refugees (Chatelard 2009). As demonstrated in the first chapter, human movements are complex and difficult to understand and assess. Many of the Iraqis living and/or working in Damascus before 2003 were able to move easily back and forth from one country to another. Once the violence increased in Iraq in 2005-2006, do those Iraqis who were already living in Syria become refugees because they don't feel it is safe to return to Iraq? Secondly, neither Syria, Jordan, nor Lebanon are signatories to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees or the 1967 Protocol. Thus these countries do not have a formalized and legal process for registering or counting refugees within their borders. Iraqis in these countries then, are not officially recognized as refugees but rather as "visitors" or "guests". Additionally, the vast majority of Iraqis fleeing the violence in their country did not find refuge in the makeshift UNHCR camps in the

border regions. Instead, they settled within the vast urban complexes of cities such as Damascus, Amman, and Beirut. Urban refugees is not a new phenomenon for refugee aid organizations but it does make it much harder to locate, track, address the needs of, and administer aid to those who have found refuge in cities with the use of their own resources. Finally, as Marfleet and Chatty point out, the way that Iraqi "visitors" are counted by the governmental authorities in countries such as Syria need to be treated with caution. They state:

> Statistics for 'Iraqi residents' of these states include people who, during recent phases of mass displacement, have undertaken repeated cross-border journeys and who are recorded by immigration services as unique individuals on the occasion of each entry; in addition, at some borders all Iraqis are counted on entry but only family units are counted on exit (Marfleet and Chatty 2009, 13).

Looking at the way these figures were calculated shows the caution that should be taken when using them as official estimates.

While "official" government estimates and the way they were calculated illustrate how there may be far less Iraqis in these countries than originally thought, there are also reasons to believe that there are far more Iraqis in these countries than is evident simply by looking at the number of Iraqis registered and receiving assistance from the UNHCR in those same countries. In 2009, there were (as noted above) 236,000 Iraqis registered and receiving assistance from the UNHCR in Syria. While the government estimate may have been an extreme overestimate at 1.2 million at the time, it is widely believed that there are more than 236,000 in the country. One of the reasons Iraqis may not want to

apply for refugee status from a UN office in Syria, Jordan, or Lebanon is because these countries, as noted earlier, are not signatories to the 1951/1967 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and thus those Iraqis seeking asylum in those countries are not afforded the rights that refugees/asylees might have elsewhere. Syria, for example, is not required to house, educate, or give any type of assistance to Iraqi "visitors" in its country. Additionally, there are widespread reports that Iraqi refugees residing in those countries have been poorly mistreated by the authorities and other "native" residents there (Ridderbos 2007; ICG 2008). In fear then of mistreatment, detainment, or of refoulement (forced deportation back to Iraq), many Iraqis prefer to keep their identity as Iraqis and/or refugees hidden.

Another reason to assume that there are more Iraqis in countries bordering Iraq than just the number of those registered by the UNHCR is due to the sectarian nature of the violence in Iraq. The increasing lack of trust between and among Iraqis and between different religious and ethnic groups has spread to some degree to surrounding countries in the Middle East, especially Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon which already have their own internal ethno-sectarian issues. So in hopes of not being targeted by specific Islamist or governmental groups, many Iraqis have chosen to remain anonymous.

Finally, many refugees are unaware or have misconceptions about the role of the UNHCR and what it means to be registered with such a political body. The existence of perceptions that once registered you will be forced to relocate in another country is a common misconception relating to registering with the UNHCR (Marfleet and Chatty

2009, 13). It also believed by some that if they register with the UNHCR in a city such as Damascus, then government authorities will have knowledge of them and thus access to them if they wish to harass, detain, or deport them. There are numerous reasons then that an Iraqi refugee may not wish to formally register as a refugee in many countries in the Middle East.

Looking at the controversy over the numbers of Iraqi refugees in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon from 2006-2010 provides a window into the dire situation for refugees in these countries, i.e. not formally recognized by governmental authorities as refugees; lack of rights if harassed or detained; fear not only of authorities in their respective country of refuge but sometimes even of their own countrymen because of the severe ethno-sectarian animosity. Unfortunately, these are not the only difficulties of seeking refuge in these countries. A number of other hardships exist as well.

Numerous reports by humanitarian aid and relief organizations started being published in 2007 documenting the difficulties and challenges of Iraqis living in other Arab countries as refugees or "visitors". The main countries under review were Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, the main receiving centers of Iraqi refugees. Reports detailing the situation for refugees in these countries give a fairly bleak view of many aspects of life for Iraqi families, children, women, and individuals. Although many aspects of life are grueling for Iraqis in these countries and there are many necessary changes and improvements that need to be made in places such as Syria to enhance the quality of life for refugees, these countries should nonetheless be commended to a degree

for allowing to Iraqis to find refuge within their borders, even if their assistance and even acknowledgment of the refugees is minimal.

One of the main issues facing Iraqis in these countries is that of healthcare. Citizens and non-citizens have free access to healthcare in Syria so ostensibly even Iraqis should be able to receive medical treatment there. However, because of the high number of Iraqis who need medical attention and the severity of the medical issues of so many of the Iraqis, that care is often neglected or unavailable (ICG 2008; Amnesty 2008). In Jordan, the healthcare situation is even worse. Jordan does not have free access to healthcare for non-citizens. It does claim to offer free services to all for emergency medical attention but, as in Syria, this leaves many Iraqis needing better quality medical attention and better access to medical services. Those suffering from chronic illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, etc. have an especially difficult time receiving the necessary attention (Amnesty 2008).

Another major issue in all countries of refuge for Iraqis is education for refugee children. While Syria and Jordan allow Iraqis to enroll in the public school system, there are many barriers for Iraqi children to receive quality education in these countries. Surveys done in Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon all showed low school enrollment for Iraqi children and increasingly high dropout rates (Ipsos 2007). Some of the reasons for this include: families needing children to work to help support the family financially; extremely overcrowded schools exacerbated by the high number of Iraqis seeking education; bullying; inability to afford simple materials and resources for education such

as uniforms, books, etc.; and difficulty for children to acclimate to new educational curriculum (Amnesty 2008).

Iraqi refugees are not legally allowed to gain employment in any of the major receiving countries. This is a major problem and it has forced many Iraqis into informal sector positions where they are often exploited and treated poorly. Because so many Iraqi males have either been killed in Iraq or have stayed behind in Iraq for work, many women are left vulnerable in these countries. This rule has also had the disastrous consequences of forcing many Iraqi women into prostitution (Amos 2010). Because Iraqis are unable to legally work in these countries, they rely almost wholly on their savings and on remittances from family members located elsewhere. Because so many Iraqis have sought refuge in in urban centers in Arab countries, however, rent prices even for dilapidated structures have skyrocketed and Iraqis' savings are being quickly depleted. This has led to an increasingly impoverished and desperate refugee population which can in turn increase tensions between them and members of the host society. The increasing impoverishment creates tension around resources such as food, water, and labor. Those Iraqis who registered with the UNHCR were able to receive some assistance in the way of food stuffs, but much less so in terms of monetary assistance (Amnesty 2008, 11). As the 2008 report "Rhetoric and Reality: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis" from the humanitarian relief organization Amnesty International states, "New protection concerns are emerging because of the growing level of poverty and lack of

hope among the refugees that the crisis will soon be over. Among these concerns are child labour, prostitution and increased domestic violence" (Amnesty 2008, 12).

Lebanon, while having many of the same issues as the other countries of refuge such as employment, education, healthcare, and housing, also has an additional downfall that has kept many Iraqis from seeking refuge there, and actually has "forced" many Iraqis to return to Iraq: that of detention (Ridderbos 2007). Amnesty reported that the issue of detaining and imprisoning Iraqi refugees improved considerably from 2007 to 2008 under the pressure of the UNHCR and other NGO's like Amnesty, but it continues to be an issue. In the 2008 report, Amnesty described the situation this way:

> Until February 2008, Iraqi refugees in Lebanon were not given a secure legal status nor recognized as refugees by the state. They were liable to arrest and indefinite detention in an attempt to coerce them to return to Iraq. As of January 2008, 600 Iraqi refugees, 323 of them registered with UNHCR, were being detained in harsh conditions in overcrowded prisons, living alongside criminals. In early 2008 it was reported that 104 Iraqis had "voluntarily" returned to Iraq after spending several months in detention. Faced with a choice of imprisonment or return to Iraq, the voluntariness of such returns must be questioned (Amnesty 2008, 20).

While these reports all do well to point out the dire situation in host countries for Iraqi refugees, they also do well to not put all the blame on the governments of these countries. Much of the responsibility rest on the shoulders of the Iraqi government for helping to "take care" of its citizens abroad, but also on the international community. Essential programs run by the UNHCR are not possible or sustainable without contributions from the international community and it is made clear in the reports that without this funding, many of the programs will be cut off.

Another important aspect of the Iraqi refugee crisis which needs to be noted here is that of a specific group of Iraqis who were thrust into a much different and very difficult refugee situation: Palestinians in Iraq. At the time of the invasion in 2003, there were between 25 and 35,000 Palestinians living in Iraq, primarily Baghdad (Enders 2008, 194). Many Palestinians fled to Iraq first in 1948-49 and then again in 1967. Over the years, more Palestinians settled in Iraq because of the high quality of life and potential business opportunities there. Furthermore, in an effort to appear to be a champion of the Palestinian cause, Saddam Hussein gave Palestinians living in Iraq some benefits, which amounted primarily to rent controlled apartments in certain areas of Baghdad. With the fall of Saddam, however, many Palestinians were thrown out of their apartments by disgruntled landlords and they were some of the first to be targeted by Shiite militia groups within the country (HRW 2006; IDMC 2011, 35).

Many Palestinians in Iraq were killed in the early years of the war and those who escaped were not allowed into Syria or Jordan (as were other Iraqi refugees) due to their lack of documentation (such as passports). Iraq has no path to citizenship for migrants such as those from Palestine; neither for the immigrant parents, nor for the children who were born in Iraq. Without official documentation showing any type of nationality, Palestinians who were able to escape the violence in Iraq were put into makeshift UN refugee camps (the main ones being the al-Tanf camp and the al-Walid camp) in "no man's land" along the Syrian-Iraqi border. These camps in the middle of the desert were without electricity, running water, or regular supplies of food. The severe conditions of

the camps were well documented on the United Nations website as that organization searched for host countries willing to resettle this "nation-less" refugee population. Not until 2009 did the US and a few other countries agree to begin resettling Palestinian Iraqis from the camps along the border.

Figure 3.4 Palestinians from Iraq after a flood in al-Tanf camp

*Source:* UNHCR/B. Auger (http://www.unhcr.org/)

While the al-Tanf camp was finally shut down in 2010, the al-Hol camp and the al-Walid camp continue to house Palestinian refugees from Iraq. More about their numbers and their resettlement to third countries will be covered in the next chapter.

Today, Iraqi refugees still exist in countries around the Middle East. There has, however, been a major shift in some of the populations, which is at the time of this

writing, very difficult to assess. What started as a part of the "Arab Spring" in Syria in 2011 has since disintegrated into a brutal and violent civil war. With fighting and bombing taking place in many parts of the country, including Damascus, the situation has worsened to the point where tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees who were residing there have chosen to return to an unstable but possibly more secure situation in Iraq. Still, other Iraqis have left Syria to seek refuge elsewhere, like Lebanon or Jordan. According to the UNHCR, there are still an estimated 65,000 Iraqi refugees in Syria and since June 2012, over 50,00 Iraqis have fled back to Iraq to find their houses either gone or taken over by another family. Thus the number of internally displaced within Iraq continues to rise as well. With the refugee situation (Iraqis and now hundreds of thousands of Syrians) in Jordan swelling, sectarian tensions from Iraq *and* Syria spreading to other countries such as Lebanon, and Egypt experiencing some of the worst violence yet due to their governmental transition (i.e. military coup), the Arab Middle East is fast becoming at once a region that is producing refugees on a large scale while also being a region that does not have the space, infrastructure or laws, or resources to safely and successfully host refugees. This catch 22 has resulted in third country resettlement for tens of thousands of Iraq refugees over the past 7 years and may very well be the only solution for the growing population of Syrian refugees. The next chapter will explore the third country resettlement of Iraqi refugees around the world and especially in the United States.

# Chapter 4: From Regional to Global Displacement: The Iraqi Refugee Crisis and Third Country Resettlement

After the initial mass refugee migrations of Iraqis beginning in 2005 and drastically increasing in 2006 from Iraq into bordering Middle Eastern countries, the plight of the Iraqis in these countries worsened as more and more refugees began to settle there. As the war in Iraq continued and sectarian violence worsened, it was determined by the UNHCR that the refugee crisis would in turn only deteriorate and that there needed to be another solution for many of the most vulnerable Iraqis in the region. The solution that was adopted, as is the case in many of the worlds protracted refugee situations, was third country refugee resettlement. In this scenario, instead of donor funding being funneled through the UNHCR to the refugee camps and/or (in the case of the Iraqi refugee crisis) to UNHCR offices in urban settings where refugees have settled with their own resources, funding goes towards resettling vulnerable refugees in "willing" third countries where these families/individuals may begin anew and, if they so choose, start on a path to citizenship in the country in which they are sent.

This chapter will look in detail at third country resettlement of Iraqis as a last resort solution to the ongoing Iraqi refugee crisis in the Middle East through 2012. Beginning with a theoretical context of third country resettlement as a humanitarian offshoot of global forced displacement, the chapter will look at the works of authors who have begun to theorize forced displacement. Following from this discussion, some

figures and statistics will be introduced to give some background on where and under what programs Iraqis were being sent around the world to resettle. Finally, the chapter will look in detail at the Iraqi resettlement in the United States using statistics gathered from the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) which is a division of the US Department of Health and Human Services and using my own data gathered from one on one interviews and participant observation while working at Refugee Services of Texas.

### 4.1 Migration and Forced Displacement in the Age of Globalization

Numerous authors over the past two decades have pointed to the disconnect between processes of globalization and the nation-states continued determination to enforce its territorial boundaries in regards to the movement of people. So while goods, finances, corporations and other entities are able to and often encouraged to move freely across borders, humans are not. Human movement and migration and the (inter)national laws and processes regulating such movement have not kept up with the pace of globalization generally. In this way, displaced peoples have often challenged the very idea and legitimacy of the nation-state. As Castles and Miller have pointed out, globalization has led to the strengthening of institutions such as the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank (Castles and Miller 2009, 13). Yet, despite this and ever-increasing rates of migration around the world, there is no global institution regulating migration or protecting the rights of migrants. The main institutions which do monitor and aid in global migration are the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the International Labor Office, none

of which have the responsibility or wherewithal to deal with cooperation between states or to monitor and help with the full complexity of global migration processes.

It is somewhat ironic that as Sassen states, "there is an intimate connection between the formation of independent nation states and the creation of the refugee" yet, at the same time, the refugee has become in many instances a direct threat to the sovereignty of the nation state (Sassen 1999, xiii). Haddad exemplifies this when she writes:

> "The growth of the nation-state has implied the naming of certain peoples as outsiders, foreigners, unwanted. The designation of individuals as obstacles to the successful formation of the nation-state has become a fundamental aspect of nation-state creation, and refugee flows are a likely outcome. They are a truly modern phenomenon that would not exist without international society. Refugees thus represent a quintessentially contemporary or 'modern' political identity crisis. In her position as an 'outsider' the refugee is a threat to state sovereignty…The refugee brings to the fore the very tension between the state prerogative to exclude and the human rights imperative to include. How then can refugee protection be reconciled with state sovereignty if the two are logically in opposition?" (2008, 69–70)

Along with the apparent opposition between nation state sovereignty and refugee movement and protection, there is also the disconnect between current thinking about the movement of goods, services, and labor, and that of human movement. In Helton's now famous work *The Price of Indifference: Refugees and Humanitarian Action in the New Century*, he reflects, "the term 'globalization' is often used to refer to the transnational movements of goods, services, and capital. The movement of people is frequently neglected as an important aspect of globalization" (2002, 7–8). Seyla Benhabib has

eloquently laid bare this disconnect between seemingly unstoppable aspects of globalization and migration:

> "The Westphalian model's efficacy and normative relevance are being challenged by the rise of a global economy through the formation of free markets in capital, finance, and labor; the increasing internationalization of armament, communication, and information technologies; the emergence of international and transnational cultural networks and electronic spheres; and the growth of sub- and transnational political actors. Globalization draws the administrative-material functions of the state into increasingly volatile contexts that far exceed any one state's capacities to influence decisions and outcomes. The nation-state is too small to deal with the economic, ecological, immunological, and informational problems created by the new environment; yet it is too large to accommodate the aspirations of identity-driven social and regionalist movements. Under these conditions, territoriality has become an anachronistic delimitation of material functions and cultural identities; yet even in the face of the collapse of traditional concepts of sovereignty, monopoly over territory is exercised through immigration and citizenship policies" (2004, 4–5).

Third country refugee resettlement thus offers a means for nation-states to at once contribute to the human rights agenda while also aiding in that of global security by ostensibly offering new opportunities for individuals languishing in a place like Damascus, for example, where there is no major prospect for employment or personal security, nor hope for returning home either. Moreover, third country refugee resettlement is a way that nation-states *can* maintain control of who enters their territory and who does not, who is excluded and who is included. States may not have control over the initial refugee flight, which is why countries of secondary resettlement (such as Syria and Jordan in the case of the Iraqi refugee crisis) often feel threatened by the presence of refugees within their borders, but nonetheless countries that feel obliged or

even coerced into helping to settle refugees from protracted refugee situations at minimum are able to control the number of those allowed in as well as choose the nationality and ethnicity of those they allow in. Loescher and Scanlan gave this idea of control of entering populations through third country refugee resettlement a different name: calculated kindness (1986). In their text they deal with refugee policy in the United States since 1945. While the US has allowed more refugees to enter their country than any other country in the world, they state, it is not without selectivity. "For each statistic of welcome, there is another of exclusion, for each example of the open door, there is another of the door banging shut…Generosity has been real, but it has also been selective. It has extended no further than politics and the law have permitted" (Loescher and Scanlan 1986, 209–210). To be sure, selecting which refugees and asylees may enter the country and which may not is a politically charged decision. Writing in the mid-80's, Loescher and Scanlan use the example of Haitian and Salvadoran asylum seekers. From the late 1970's through the 1980's they state, thousands of Haitians filed asylum claims, of which a very small number was granted. During the same period, the authors claim, tens of thousands of Salvadorans were "detained in guarded camps, and tens of thousands more were shipped home against their will" (Loescher and Scanlan 1986, 209–210). This type of selectivity was not limited, however, only to the time period in which Loescher and Scanlan were writing their text. Today, human movement around the world has reached an unprecedented level and numbers of refugees have also increased to worrying numbers. More than ever though it seems that refugees are "cared for or ignored at the

whim of sovereign states or their surrogates based on a determination of how dangerous their movement is to global or Western security" (Owens 2011, 134).

The US is not the only country guilty of this selective control, or as Loescher and Scanlan would say, calculated kindness. Most developed "Western" nations resettle far less refugees than the US, if they resettle any at all. Control is a central theme, however, surrounding not only the policies of a nation-state in terms of migration in general but of forced migration as well. The idea comes up again and again. Butler pleads, "…both our political and ethical responsibilities are rooted in the recognition that radical forms of self-sufficiency and unbridled sovereignty are, by definition, disrupted by the larger global processes of which they are a part, that no final control can be secured, and that final control is not, cannot be, an ultimate value" (2004, xiii). Nonetheless, Sassen's words on immigration policy in the US in 1999 still ring with truth today, "Pulled on the one hand by economic globalization and on the other by the growth of civil rights and the international human rights regime, the US government has responded to immigration by invoking the same old tenets: control, including militarized, over its borders and its absolute unilateral sovereign power on immigration questions" (1999, xviii). With the current immigration debate ongoing in the US, there are still many in government who support increased border security and strict regulations on visas for students, workers, and even foreign-born spouses of American citizens. Control over populations is necessary for the formation and governing of a population. Aspects of (im)migration, however, and refugee movement in particular can easily make a state feel out of control

as refugees "represent the limits of the society of states in which populations are 'segmented, ordered, and governed'" (Owens 2011, 134).

One of the writers who theorizes about the consequences of total state control over immigration and the displaced person in particular and whose name has become somewhat ubiquitous among theoretical works on refugee issues is Giorgio Agamben. Agamben argues that displaced people (i.e. the asylee, the refugee, etc.) are examples and hence embodiment of a specific type of human condition. In his texts (1998; 2005) Agamben explores the state and the nature of the state, but especially those situations where there is a 'state of exception" which can deprive individuals of their rights and transform them into what he calls *homo sacer*, individuals without rights of citizenship. Agamben attempts to illustrate that these types of situations have and continue to occur currently through examples of pre-war Nazi Germany in the twentieth century to the various immigration detention facilities located throughout the US, Europe, Australia, and elsewhere. As Chatty states, "Although Agamben's work is not directly focused on theories of migration, it sets out a powerful argument for recognizing the figure of the refugee or forced migrant as a trope for contemporary interstate politics" (2010, 12).

Although Agamben's work may not be directly focused on migration, it is directly focused on an individual's rights, particularly rights of citizenship. Rights of citizenship are of paramount concern when it comes to any kind of migration and migrant rights, but especially those of the displaced person, particularly the refugee. The rights of an Iraqi man displaced in Beirut, Lebanon, can be used as an example. Once arriving in Lebanon,

this person does not have the right to seek employment, nor to seek protection from the police. In fact, as was illustrated in the previous chapter, this person could potentially be (as hundreds of Iraqis were) detained and imprisoned by the Lebanese police simply for *being* a refugee in that country, and moreover, he would be imprisoned without the right to legal representation. Even if this person was to register for refugee status at a UNHCR office in Beirut, it would not be of much help to him in terms of his rights since Lebanon as a country is not a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention nor to the 1967 Protocol. While this example of 'living in limbo' – a term borrowed originally from van Gennep's liminality phase from his work *Rites of Passage* (1909), but used in the context of refugee resettlement by Vrecer (2010) – may not be as dire a situation as someone in the concentration camp, or in the migration detention center, it is not to be taken lightly and deserves serious consideration for future policy construction and changes generally to refugee treatment and protection in the region of the Middle East.

A particularly vulnerable refugee group, especially in the context of the Middle East is that of women. Even as citizens in the Middle East (depending on the country, of course) women have limited rights, so as refugees, single women and single mothers can be especially at risk. There are a number of works which use Agamben to discuss and to theorize refugee issues and gender. Numerous edited collections explore and discuss the plight of the refugee woman and ways in which she could be better protected (Giles and Hyndman 2004; Hajdukowski-Ahmed, Khanlou, and Moussa 2008; Benhabib and Resnik 2009). None of these works document the terrible situation that many Iraqi refugee

women find themselves in in countries of second resettlement. Deborah Amos' *Eclipse of the Sunnis* is by far the best book to date detailing the dire circumstances many Iraqi women find themselves in in Syria (2010). Not only are single Iraqi women and mothers dealing with extreme poverty and the many Arab/Islamic cultural issues that come with being a single woman, many are also forced into prostitution and the sex trade. Amos, who took numerous visits to Damascus in 2007 and 2008, spoke with various Iraqi women involved in the sex trade there. Giving these women voices, a section of Amos' book is dedicated to telling their stories and the causes and effects of the Iraq war on Iraqi refugee women in Syria. Amos writes:

> "Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of the Iraqi exiles in Syria had turned to the sex trade for survival. Nearly every war brings prostitution. But in Damascus, girls as young as ten were forced into the trade by parents-fathers or mothers, who made the deal and lived off the proceeds. Officially, refugees were not permitted to hold jobs and had to manage on whatever savings they had. As resources dwindled, despair and desperation set in, which led some to the underground economy. Female-headed households accounted for almost a quarter of the refugees registered with the United Nations refugee agency. Widowed, divorced, or separated from husbands by the war, many women had children or elderly parents to support. Sex was often their only marketable asset" (2010, 84–85).

Through this illustration of life for many Iraqi women in Syria, it is easy to see not only the consequences of sectarian violence and war inside of Iraq, but also of the costs of living as a refugee in countries outside of your home country, where ones rights as a citizen are either circumspect or simply non existent.

As stated earlier, the solution not only to the protracted Iraqi refugee situation in countries bordering Iraq, but to help these thousands of Iraqi individuals escape this state

of in-betweenness, this state of being in limbo with few, if any, rights, the international humanitarian regime turned to agencies such as the UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as well as UN donor states to aid in resettling thousands of vulnerable Iraqi refugees to third country destinations where they can at the very least have *more* rights and start on a path to citizenship (depending on the third country of resettlement). While one could argue that refugees who opt for third country resettlement certainly *do* have more rights and at the very least increased safety and security, it could also be argued that refugees who resettle in the West through official resettlement channels are still 'living in limbo' as residents with neither the full rights of a citizen but not without important rights (i.e. employment, protection, etc.) either. Still in a state of marginality, however, and often times invisible within the host society, refugees in third countries can face grim circumstances which are only compounded by their traumatic past. This has certainly been the case for many Iraqi refugees resettled in the United States and parts of Europe. The following section then will give a look where, how many, and under what programs Iraqi refugees began to resettle in the West.

### 4.2 Global Resettlement of Iraqis: 2006-2012

As Iraqis began to trickle out of Iraq in 2003 (at that time it was mostly among those who were loyal to Saddam Hussein's regime) and then in 2005 as sectarian violence began to rise and finally in 2006 when hundreds of thousands began to flee, some settled in Syria, Jordan, and other countries around the Arab East (as discussed above), while others used their resources to settle (or attempt to settle) in much more

distant locales, namely countries in Europe. Many of the thousands of Iraqi refugees who fled to Europe and beyond did so, not with the help or coordination of the UNHCR, but with the use of smugglers. It must be noted that the journeys taken by the majority of Iraqis to get to many countries in Europe, for example, were of a very different order than those taken by Iraqis to get to the United States after 2006. Once the UNHCR did determine that the Iraqi refugee crisis was one that warranted "official" third country resettlement, some European countries did resettle small numbers of Iraqis through that process. Most Iraqis that were able to resettle in parts of Europe, however, arrived there themselves after difficult and dangerous (and very expensive) journeys and upon their arrival applied for asylum status. Depending on the country to which they fled, they were either granted asylum status in that country or their asylum application was rejected and they were forced back to Middle East, or in some cases, forced to return to Iraq. It should be stated here that there is no internationally recognized legal obligation for any country to accept or resettle refugees or asylees. It is not surprising then that the rules and regulations vary widely from country to country in terms of who and how many may be granted entry to a country based on asylum or refugee claims.

Before 2003, there was already a fairly sizeable Iraqi diaspora in various parts of the world who had fled the brutal policies of the regime (discussed at length in chapter 3). It is estimated that the number of Iraqis who had found refuge around the world by the time of the fall of the regime was around one million (Sassoon 2009, 87). The majority of these Iraqis were living in the United States, Western Europe (especially Sweden,

Germany, and the United Kingdom), and Australia. These areas with already high concentrations of Iraqis played a role in determining where many Iraqis would flee from the Iraq war after 2003. Of these various countries to which Iraqis fled, Sweden deserves special attention.

Although Sweden did not play a role in the war in Iraq, it nevertheless played one of the largest roles, if not *the* largest, in helping to aid and resettle Iraqis fleeing the conflict. Sweden has a long history and reputation of opening its doors to displaced peoples and for decades has maintained a liberal immigration policy (Pred 1997). As Sassoon points out, while there are no official statistics, it is believed that there were between 90,000 and 100,000 Iraqis living in Sweden prior to the fall of Saddam's regime in 2003 (Sassoon 2009, 100). But the reason that Sweden deserves special mention in the context of the ongoing Iraqi refugee crisis is that since 2003 it has helped to resettle over 50,000 Iraqis within its borders. The high number of Iraqis making their way to Sweden does not come without risk or challenges, whether that risk be simply in the journey to get to Sweden or in gaining asylum status and attempting to successfully integrate into that society, which is, despite their reputation for having an open door policy, not a melting pot like the United States and has experienced phases of fervent xenophobic, anit-immigrant, and racist sentiment in its past and present (Pred 1997). Nonetheless, by 2007, Sweden had accepted more Iraqis than any other "Western" country in the world. So much so that there was a somewhat successful push by certain factions in the Swedish government to stop accepting nearly all Iraqi asylum applications and to forcibly return

hundreds of Iraqis back to Iraq (Amnesty 2008, 38–39). On the exterior, Swedish officials claimed this was largely in response to the American troop surge in Iraq which for a brief period of time reduced the violence in Iraq and thus it was deemed by Swedish authorities that the situation there was not dangerous enough to grant asylum to Iraqis coming into the country during this time. This was, however, largely a response from some of the more conservative groups and individuals in Swedish government whose constituents were beginning to feel threatened by the increasingly large number of Iraqis settling on the outskirts of Stockholm (Castle 2010).

The increase in rejections of Iraqi asylum applications in Sweden in 2007 was also in response to the lack of support from other European countries in accepting Iraqi asylees. As stated above, no country is legally obligated by international law to accept asylees arriving on their own *or* refugees registered through the UNHCR. Nonetheless, countries that do accept refugees and asylees for resettlement, hope that other countries will also "share the burden" of aiding some of the worlds most vulnerable displaced populations. Most countries in Europe and around the world were unwilling to "share the burden" of accepting and resettling Iraqis from the Iraq war in any kind of significant way, however (Sperl 2007).

The two countries which came under the most scrutiny with not aiding the hundreds of thousands of displaced Iraqis was, of course, the United States and Britain, the two main countries that initiated and participated in the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 and by 2007 had only resettled a few hundred Iraqis. As Sassoon writes, "the UK,

like several other EU states, ruled that the situation in Iraq post-2003 does not warrant providing protection for refugees…Britain is also the only country in Europe that forcibly repatriates Iraqis in significant numbers. For those whose claims have been rejected, they are able to stay in Britain but live on the margins of society unable to work and in a constant legal limbo" (2009, 107). A journalist for the British newspaper *The Guardian* writing in 2008 about the difficult situation of Iraqis trying to enter the UK quoted Bjarte Vandvik, the secretary general for the European Council on Refugees and Exiles, as saying, "The British government is insisting it is OK for people to go back to Iraq because recognizing that it is not means acknowledging that the military operation there has failed" (Godfrey 2008). It is examples such as this which highlight how and when politics and forced displacement intersect. Migration is often a politically charged subject, yet this example shows how political actors and ideologies can so easily exclude those needing protection. Unfortunately, the situation in the United States for admitting Iraqis entry was similar to that of the UK at first, but did begin to change after 2007.

#### 4.2.1 Characteristics of Iraqi resettlement in the US

In 2006, when the refugee crisis in Iraq really started to pick up, the United States took on a similar approach as the UK: not to resettle Iraqis in the US. By 2006, the US was not ready to admit that the war in Iraq was going to be a protracted situation and thus was not ready to begin accepting Iraqi refugees for resettlement. By the end of the 2006 fiscal year, for example, while hundreds of thousands (if not millions) of Iraqis had been displaced within Iraq and around the region the US had resettled a total of 400 Iraqi

refugees[6]. Starting in fiscal year 2007, the US began to adopt policies that would allow a much greater number of Iraqis to resettle here through two main channels. Those programs and numbers will be explored below as well as looking at some of the policies in the US surrounding refugee resettlement here and the resulting challenges of being a refugee in the US. The following section will rely partly on secondary source information but will also utilize information gathered through my participant observation at a refugee resettlement agency in Austin, TX as well as interview data. First, however, some general contextual information on the background of refugee resettlement in the United States.

According to the Refugee Council USA[7], since 1975 the US has resettled over 3 million refugees with annual admissions numbers ranging from a high of 207,000 in 1980 to a low of 27,110 in 2002. Since 1980, the average number of refugee admissions to the US is 98,000. 1980 was a benchmark year in US refugee policy as that is the year the US Refugee Act was enacted allowing more refugees to be admitted to the US and to broaden the US's legal definition of a refugee. Before 1980, the vast majority of refugees eligible to be admitted to the US were those who were escaping communist countries (D. A. Martin 2005, 15). Despite Loescher and Scanlan's claim of "calculated kindness" in

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[6] statistics on Iraqi refugee numbers provided by the United States Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) - http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextchannel=68439c7755cb9010VgnVCM10000045f3d6a1RCRD&vgnextoid=df4c47c9de5ba110VgnVCM1000004718190aRCRD

[7] http://www.rcusa.org/index.php?page=history

terms of who and how many refugees are admitted to the US every year, this country has a history of accepting refugees and asylum seekers and annually resettles more refugees than any other country in the world. Still, it is important to point out that third country resettlement (the world over) is almost always the last resort in terms of aiding refugee populations around the world. To put this into context, according to the UNHCR website, there are currently an estimated 39.2 million displaced people globally[8]. 10.4 million of those are classified as refugees while the remaining 28.8 million are internally displaced. According to Dwyer:

> "Of the three durable solutions available to refugees (repatriation, local integration into the country of first asylum, and resettlement in third countries) the first two options are favored over resettlement by the international community. The common rationale behind this preference is that resettlement programs are resource intensive, but assist limited numbers and groups. Only 1% of worldwide refugees get resettled. The ongoing argument in the industry is that resettlement funds can accomplish much more if they are used for refugee assistance programs aimed at local integration in the countries of first asylum" (Dwyer 2010, 7).

Understanding that only 1% of refugees worldwide participate in third country resettlement is a first step to understanding why Iraqis were resettled in such low numbers at the outset of the Iraqi refugee crisis. Without condoning the fact that so few Iraqis were resettled at that time, it is important to see here that countries do not jump at the option of resettling refugee populations at home, even if a crisis is at hand.

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[8] http://www.unhcr.org/pages/49c3646c11.html

There are other reasons, of course, that the US and various other countries don't resettle much larger populations of refugees annually and how the Iraqi refugee crisis plays into those concerns. One of the main reasons is that of security. As mentioned above, the lowest annual number of refugees that have been admitted to the US since 1980 is 27,110 in 2002. The reason for this historically low number of course was the 9/11 attacks and the resulting security concerns over "foreigners" inside of the US, especially Arabs. Out of the 9/11 attacks came the Patriot Act and the Department of Homeland Security, both of which have made life for Arabs and Arab-Americans living in the US exceedingly difficult (for more on this subject see Elaasar 2004; Jamal and Naber 2008; Bayoumi 2008; Cainkar 2008; Mei-Po 2008; Cainkar 2009; Nassar-McMillan, Lambert, and Hakirn-Larson 2011). The heightened security concerns over Arabs in the US resulting from the September 11$^{th}$ attacks thus made the case for admitting thousands of Iraqis politically charged and difficult to say the least. While bi-partisan support for refugee resettlement in the US is the norm, agreeing to resettle Iraqi refugees was a controversial matter.

Another reason countries, including the US, don't often resort to third country resettlement, especially currently, is due to economic factors. Since 2008, tensions over immigration and immigration policy have been rising in the US and Europe partially because of the economic recession. A number of countries in Europe such as Sweden, Norway, Austria, Germany, Finland, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and Britain have seen the election and, at the very least, increasing popularity of right wing political parties of

which curbing immigration and anti-Islamic sentiment stand as some of their major platforms of reform (B. Briggs 2011). As Sassen has demonstrated, competition for labor is one of the major factors for increased tensions between "native" and "foreign" communities in the past (Sassen 1999). Refugee populations, as she points out, are often in the middle of these tensions during times of economic hardships. Even if refugees have legal authorization to be in a country, their status as refugees or asylees unfortunately does not protect them from nativism, racism, or xenophobia.

While those traits are unfortunately a reality to varying degrees in the US and Europe, another trait that has been the topic of much discussion in the media and to some extent in academia is that of "Islamaphobia". While the US governments response to the 9/11 attacks was primarily that of the Patriot Act and formation of the Department of Homeland Security, there have been many more localized responses by conservative political groups, local governments, religious organizations, and individuals. In 2010, for example, *Time Magazine* ran a cover article entitled "Islamaphobia: Does America have a Muslim Problem" (Ghosh 2010). In this article Ghosh brings the effects of the 9/11 attacks and subsequent American-led military efforts in the Arab/Islamic world to the forefront. The effects are far reaching. While tracing the controversy over a proposed Islamic Center at Ground Zero, the site of the 9/11 attacks, he shows that while that is the best known example, many other similar incidents are happening in other parts of the country. One example Ghosh gives took place in small-town Wisconsin where a local Muslim doctor presented his application to open a mosque on land he owned to the local

planning commission. Many of the people present on the commission began to question the project. *Time* obtained the minutes from the meeting and Ghosh quotes some of the comments made:

> "'I don't want it in my backyard,' says one. Another says, 'I just think its not America.' Looking back, Mirza (the doctor) recalls that a couple of speakers tried to steer the conversation into calmer territory. 'I don't think that we should be making broad sweeping generalizations,' said one. But such words barely gave pause to the blunt expressions of suspicion and hostility toward Islam and Muslims…Mirza kept calm when a commissioner asked if there would be any weapons or military training at the mosque. But, afterward, Pakistani-born Mirza, 38, was shaken. 'I never expected that the same people who came to me at the hospital and treated me with respect would talk to me like this.'" (Ghosh 2010)

Other incidents in the US and abroad have sought to deteriorate relations with Muslim populations as well. The proposed burning of a Koran by a pastor in Florida in 2011, while seen largely as an isolated incident here in the US by a member of a far right religious group, drew a strong and angry international response by Muslims throughout the Arab and Islamic worlds. The "accidental" burning of Korans by the US Marines at a military base in Afghanistan led to mass protests and demonstrations in that country (Bumiller 2012). While these incidents illustrate examples of the Islamaphobia by isolated individuals, examples similar to the one that occurred in Wisconsin are happening often enough to where they are beginning to look like more than just a series of isolated events. As Ghosh points out, in 2010, at least 6 projects to build mosques around the country came up against bitter opposition from the respective communities. The sum of all the events (and the myriad of other anti-Islamic incidents that have

occurred in the US since 2001) described here illustrate a particularly unwelcoming tone not only within the government bureaus that make decisions about incoming refugee populations, but also, to an extent, within American communities at large, and to an even larger extent, within the consciousness of the general public. How then was it possible that Iraqis began to be admitted by the tens of thousands to the US?

As Iraqis finally started to arrive in the US in 2007, they were entering a country that was extremely divided on the war in Iraq. They were also entering a country where much of the population was, at best, ignorant of the culture, society, and politics of the Arab world other than what was shown on major American news networks and, at worst, Islamaphobic. Finally, Iraqis were also arriving to a country where divisions over state and federal immigration policies run deep. Nonetheless, for Iraqi refugees to begin to be admitted to the US in relatively large numbers shows that there was enough support for the program in Congress. Fortunately, refugee resettlement issues often receive broad bi-partisan support within the US congress and despite there being segments of the general population (and some in government) who were wary of admitting thousands of Iraqi Arabs and Muslims to the United States, there was enough pressure on the US from various entities, organizations, and individuals to pass legislation to bring Iraqi refugees to this country. One of the main, if not *the* main, supporters of admitting Iraqi refugees to the US was the late Senator Edward Kennedy. Starting in 2006, Senator Kennedy began an effort to aid Iraqis displaced by the American-led war there. One of the ways in which he envisioned this aid was through third country resettlement in the US. Here is an

excerpt from an editorial Kennedy wrote which was published in *The Washington Post* in December of 2006:

> "The [Iraqi] refugees are witnesses to the cruelty that stains our age, and they cannot be overlooked. America bears heavy responsibility for their plight. We have a clear obligation to stop ignoring it and help chart a sensible course to ease the refugee crisis. Time is not on our side. We must act quickly and effectively…There is an overwhelming need for temporary relief and permanent resettlement. Last year, however, America accepted only 202 Iraqi refugees, and next year we plan to accept approximately the same number. We and other nations of the world need to do far better…Our nation is spending $8 billion a month to wage the war in Iraq. Yet to meet the urgent humanitarian needs of the refugees who have fled the war, the State Department plans to spend only $20 million in the current fiscal year" (Kennedy 2006).

Through Kennedys efforts in government as well as continuing pressure from the UNHCR and various national and international refugee and human rights organizations, namely Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Human Rights First, Refugee International, the Migration Policy Institute and the International Rescue Committee, Congress and the President Bush approved the resettlement of Iraqis in the US.

2007 saw a marked increase in the number of Iraqis resettled to the US. For the 2007 fiscal year[9] a total of 1,608 Iraqi refugees were admitted. While a drastic increase from the previous two years, this number was still considered far too low as the US government continued to be pressured by various politicians in Washington (namely Kennedy and his supporters) as well as by human rights organizations. Washington came

[9] All refugee admissions statistics are based on the fiscal year in the US which runs from October 1st of the previous calendar year to September 30th of the year with which it is numbered.

under increased pressure not just to resettle refugees from Iraq, but also those Iraqis that had worked for US government institutions or for US affiliated contractors in Iraq whose lives were in danger because of that connection. It was estimated in 2008 by the Congressional Budget Office that around 142,000 Iraqis had worked as contract employees for the US government or with USAID funded programs. According to Human Rights First 2010 report, "Living in Limbo: Iraqi Refugees and U.S. Resettlement", an additional 4,000 Iraqis have worked for the US embassy in Baghdad or for US affiliated media companies and/or NGO's in Iraq (Human Rights First 2010). These Iraqis, often referred to as "US-affiliated Iraqis" were often translators or partaking in other service related jobs for the US military or US based corporations operating inside of the country. Kennedy called out this population as well in his *Washington Post* editorial in 2006 saying:

> "Thousands of these refugees are fleeing because they have been affiliated in some way with the United States. Cooks, drivers and translators have been called traitors for cooperating with the United States. They know all too well that the fate of those who work with U.S. civilians or military forces can be sudden death. Yet, beyond a congressionally mandated program that accepts 50 Iraqi translators from Iraq and Afghanistan each year, the administration has done nothing to resettle brave Iraqis who provided assistance in some way to our military. This lack of conscience is fundamentally unfair. We need to do much more to help Iraqi refugees, especially those who have helped our troops" (Kennedy 2006).

Many other voices echoed Kennedy's in support of aiding Iraqis who were in danger because of their affiliation with the US in Iraq. One of these voices, for example, was Kirk Johnson who was a former USAID worker based in Baghdad and Fallujah in

2005 and who later started the The List Project to Resettle Iraqi Allies. According to the The List Project's website, they were founded, "with the belief that the United States government has a clear and urgent moral obligation to resettle to safety Iraqis who are imperiled due to their affiliation with the United States of America"[10]. Johnson began to accumulate a list of names of Iraqis whose lives were in severe danger who were either referred to him by other American employees in Iraq or by Iraqis affiliated with the US themselves. As the List project began to garner more and more attention not just in the media but in governmental circles as well, the issue of US affiliated Iraqis was seriously considered by congress and finally in 2008, Section 1244 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 as modified by Public Law 110-242 authorized an allotment of up to 5,000 special immigrant visas for Iraqis for each fiscal year from 2008 through 2012. This program, popularly referred to as the Special Immigrant Visa (SIV's) program for Afghans and Iraqis was seen as a success for advocates such as Johnson. The US-affiliated Iraqis who were able to arrive in the US were given many of the same benefits as the refugees (which will be explained in more detail below). One benefit the US affiliated Iraqis would have once they arrived to this country that refugees do not is that they would receive their permanent residency authorization upon arrival whereas refugees arriving in the US have to wait one full year before receiving this authorization.

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[10] http://thelistproject.org/about-the-list-project/

The law that allowed the Special Immigrant Visa Program to be passed in Congress was part of a larger act called the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act which was introduced as a bi-partisan bill in June 2007 by Senator Kennedy, a democrat from Massachusetts and Republican Senator Gordon Smith (Oregon). The bill garnered the required support in Congress and was passed in January 2008 with President Bush signing the Act into law in February 2008 as part of the National Defense Authorization Act. The act itself was written to provide assistance and relief to Iraqi refugees and those Iraqis who had worked in various capacities with the US military and its contractors. It is important to note here, that in the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act was written an additional provision (other than the SIV program) to aid in the resettlement of US-affiliated Iraqis. This was the Priority 2 (P2) program which allowed Iraqis and close family relatives to apply for the US refugee resettlement program without a UNHCR referral. Priority 2 cases refer, according to the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS), to those "groups of special humanitarian concern identified by the U.S. refugee program"[11]. Priority 2 is one of three main classification schemes of the US refugee program. Priority 1, the most common classification of incoming refugees refers to individuals or groups that are identified and referred to the program by the UNHCR, a US embassy, or a designated NGO. Priority 3, on the other hand, is for family reunification cases.

The US- affiliated Iraqis coming in under the P2 program who were deemed to be of special humanitarian concern to the US governemnt would still have to pass the same

[11] http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis

security checks and complete a similar application process to those Iraqi refugees who were applying for refugee status and US resettlement through UNHCR offices in Syria, for example. The main difference between the P2 program in the case of Iraqis and the typical US resettlement program process, however, and that which is important on a more general scale in the refugee studies field as a whole is that P2 Iraqis were able to apply for US refugee resettlement only in Jordan, Egypt, *and* inside of Iraq. While Iraqis coming to the US through the SIV program were able to apply for SIV status inside of Iraq and were given many of the same benefits as refugees upon arrival to the United States, they were not technically classified as refugees because they were admitted through the SIV program. Iraqis coming through the P2 program, however, *are* classified as refugees and more interestingly were able to successfully apply for this status without being "outside the country of his/her nationality", based on the legal definition provided by the UNHCR and the definition under which the US refugee program operates. Applying for the P2 program inside of Iraq is made possible through a little used process known as in-country processing. According to the USCIS website, "refugees must generally be outside their country of origin, but we can process some individuals in their home countries if authorized by the President"[12].

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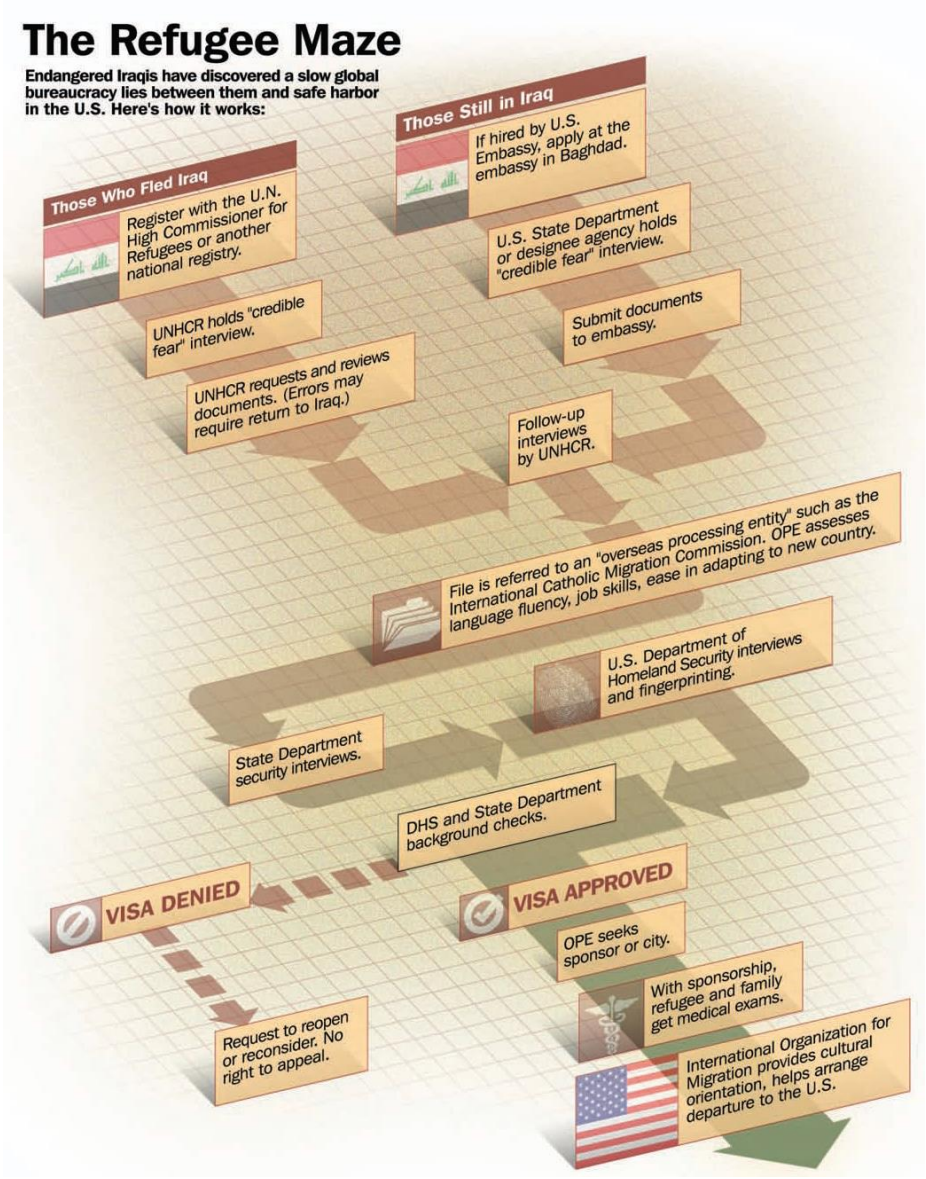
12 http://www.uscis.gov/portal/site/uscis/menuitem.5af9bb95919f35e66f614176543f6d1a/?vgnextchannel=385d3e4d77d73210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD&vgnextoid=796b0eb389683210VgnVCM100000082ca60aRCRD

As discussed in chapter 2, current definitions of a refugee are not only controversial but there is also discussion and debate over ways in which the definition of a refugee should be formally changed. Internally displace persons, it is argued by some, should be included in an internationally recognized and accepted definition of refugees as there are according to the UNHCR, not only *more* internally displaced people worldwide but they are also deemed by many to be more vulnerable than displaced populations who have sought refuge across borders. What "in-country processing" by the US refugee program shows then is not only the capacity to process families and individuals inside of the country where the conflict and violence is occurring, but, more importantly a willingness to do so by a country who admits more refugees annually than any other country in the world. While the US-affiliated Iraqis who have been admitted to the US through the P2 program may or may not have been internally displaced inside Iraq (for sure, many of them were), in-country processing of these Iraqis provides an argument for changing (or at least updating) the definition of a refugee to include those vulnerable persons who are, for whatever reason, still inside the country of their nationality.

In addition to US-affiliated Iraqis, the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act was of course also meant for the general (and much larger) Iraqi refugee population who *had* fled across international borders. This program followed a more typical process for admitting and resettling refugees to the US. The way this process works for urban refugees (as opposed to refugees living in UNHCR sanctioned camps) is that the refugee must apply for legal refugee status typically at a UNHCR office, US embassy, or a designated NGO office.

After a lengthy application process and a series of interviews, the person or family must then be designated as a refugee by the organization and then they are referred to the US for resettlement. At that time entities of the US Department of State as well as the Department for Homeland Security make the determination of whether or not that individual will be admitted to the US for resettlement. This is by no means a quick process (see Figure 4.1). And there were other reasons for the delay in an expedited beginning to this program to resettle Iraqis to the US. According to US Department of State officials at a 2008 conference entitled "The Iraqi Refugee Crisis: Law, Policy and Practice", one of the reasons for the delayed resettlement of much greater numbers of Iraqis had to do with the countries in which they were resettling outside of Iraq. As noted above, countries such as Syria, Jordan, and Lebanon are not signatories to the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and thus when Iraqis began to flee to the countries in the tens and hundreds of thousands, there was not the adequate infrastructure

Figure 4.1 The Refugee Maze




*Source: American Bar Association Journal, graphic by Jeff Dionise (Edwards 2008)*

in place to process and refer these refugees to the US in such high numbers. In other words, US government designated NGO's, and the UNHCR were not prepared or

equipped for the influx of refugees in those countries in late 2005 but especially in early 2006. Another logical reason is that, given the size of the US refugee program, and the slow pace of the bureaucracy of the US government, the implementation of any program this large is bound to take time. As Martin states in his text on US refugee resettlement policy and specifically on the changes that were made to the US refugee program after the passage of the Refugee Act in 1980:

> "Over the succeeding decades, the nature of the refugee admissions program has evolved considerably. The new processing techniques hastily cobbled together in the late 1970's…became more routine and sophisticated, and they were extended to other refugee situations as well…Refugee resettlement became more institutionalized. Planning mechanisms developed, officers began to speak of a resettlement pipeline, and NGOs added staff and developed an enduring network of field offices throughout the United States to help manage the reception and integration of arriving refugees. This evolution represents a major triumph of the USRP – creating and sustaining such a system at reasonable cost levels, importantly involving a major public-private partnership. But with machinery on this scale, it is difficult to make sudden changes, of level or location. Solid planning and clear benchmarks of performance can be of considerable use" (2005, 16–17)

As Martin points out in this excerpt, the US refugee program has made vast improvements since 1980 but because of the size of the "machinery" of the program, it is not very flexible. It is unfortunate that a program whose mission is to serve vulnerable populations, many of whom are at immediate risk, is not equipped to deal with humanitarian refugee crises at a swift pace. Nonetheless, there were many critics who believed that the US and the international community should have been better prepared for this refugee situation and that there was too much red tape that was putting peoples' lives at further risk who were already facing dangerous situations. As we will see below,

that same red tape and sluggish pace of the bureaucracy continues to hinder both the program admitting Iraqi refugees and the Special Immigrant Visa program bringing in US-affiliated Iraqis.

After 2007, and particularly after the passing of the Refugee Crisis in Iraq Act in early 2008, the numbers of Iraqi refugees admitted to the US did increase dramatically. Figure 4.2 below shows the number of Iraqi refugees (not US-affiliated Iraqis admitted under the SIV program) resettled in the US from fiscal year 2007 to April 30, 2013.

Figure 4.2 Iraqi refugee admissions to the US

| | **FY 2007** | **FY 2008** | **FY 2009** | **FY 2010** | **FY 2011** | **FY 2012** | **FY 2013** | **Total** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Referrals to USRAP** | 12,098 | 28,769 | 49,276 | 46,472 | 39,878 | 15,878 | 10,950 | 203,321 |
| **USCIS Interviews** | 4,437 | 23,862 | 29,096 | 27,277 | 26,831 | 20,073 | 11,094 | 142,670 |
| **Approved by USCIS** | 2,909 | 18,674 | 25,238 | 24,021 | 22,323 | 16,992 | 9,045 | 199,202 |
| **Admitted to US** | 1,608 | 13,823 | 18,838 | 18,016 | 9,388 | 12,163 | 11,066 | 84,902 |

*Source: USCIS Iraqi Refugee Processing Fact Sheet - http://www.uscis.gov/*

Looking at this table, one can see the increase in numbers. These numbers include, of course, those US-affiliated Iraqis coming through the P2 program. One point that is evident from these numbers is that there is a far greater number of referrals and interviews than there are actual admissions of Iraqis to the US. Looking at the total number of referrals to admittance ratio, less than half of those referred to the USCIS by the UNHCR were granted admission to the US for resettlement. The primary reason for

this is, of course, security clearances. The process for security clearance for Iraqi refugees to be admitted to the US is lengthy and thorough almost to a fault and from 2007 to present, that process was overhauled and has become even lengthier and more time consuming, thus lengthening the processing times for refugee applicants. Here is the description of the security screening process given by the USCIS on their "Iraqi Refugee Processing Fact Sheet":

> Eligibility for refugee status is decided on a case-by-case basis. A USCIS officer conducts a personal interview of the applicant designed to elicit information about the applicant's admissibility and claim for refugee status. During the interview, the officer confirms the basic biographical data of the applicant; verifies that the applicant was properly given access to the USRAP; determines whether the applicant has suffered past persecution or has a well-founded fear of future persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion in his or her home country; determines whether the applicant is admissible to the United States and whether he or she has been firmly resettled in another country; and assesses the credibility of the applicant.
>
> We are committed to conducting the most rigorous screening in order to ensure that those being admitted through the refugee program are not seeking to harm the United States. In May 2007, DHS announced and implemented an Administration-coordinated, enhanced background and security check process for Iraqi refugees applying for resettlement in the United States. The security check regime, including both biographic and biometric checks, has been enhanced periodically over the last several years as new opportunities and interagency partnerships with the law enforcement and intelligence communities have been identified. These enhancements are a reflection of the commitment of DHS and other agencies to conduct the most thorough checks possible to prevent dangerous individuals from gaining access to the United States through the refugee program. No case is finally approved until results from all security checks have been received and analyzed (USCIS 2013).

In reading this excerpt, the USCIS is explicitly showing that there is a separate and specialized security screening process specifically for Iraqi refugees which demonstrates

the political nature of resettling this refugee group. The numbers from Figure 4.2 along with the information about the enhanced security screening illustrate at once the US government's wariness at resettling an Arab/Islamic population on a large scale as well as exemplifying the aspect of exclusion when it comes to resettling refugee populations to this country more generally. The increase in the number of Iraqis admitted to the US from 2007 to 2009 was certainly a positive development yet the number of rejections of Iraqis attempting to enter the country is staggering.

I do not wish to downplay the importance of having a security screening program in place for refugee resettlement to the US, especially in a country/region where much of the population is known to have negative sentiment to the US government. Nevertheless the screening process has been criticized to a degree as it undermines the very mission the USRP seeks to accomplish: to resettle refugees facing immediate danger both inside and outside of Iraq. Returning to Human Rights First detailed 2010 report, "Living in Limbo: Iraqi Refugees and U.S. Resettlement", almost all of the key findings and policy recommendations listed in this report have to do with slow processing times, whether they be the processing of initial applications, security checks, or background checks. The report details some of the inefficiencies that have caused these various delays such as lack of sufficient manpower to process the applications. In regards to the security screening process specifically the report states:

> "The conduct of effective security checks is an essential step in the screening of any individual who enters the United States. The security check process necessarily requires time and attention, including to analyze applicants who may have common names. However, the average time for conducting a

> security advisory opinion is five months for Iraqi refugees – meaning that many Iraqis wait longer than five months for their checks to clear. Human Rights First researchers interviewed a number of refugee families in Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt who had been waiting for nine or ten months-or even longer-after other processing had been completed, for their security processing to be concluded" (Human Rights First 2010, 4).

It turns out that the lengthy security processes and concerns were at once extremely flawed yet substantiated in 2011. Looking back at figure 4.2, one will notice the drastic decrease in Iraqi arrivals to the US from 2010 to 2011. The main reason for this was due to a case in early 2011 where two Iraqi refugees who had been admitted to the US and resettled in Bowling Green, KY were charged with sending cash, explosives and missiles to Iraq for use against American troops (Bennett and Memoli 2011). This case severely affected both the speed and number of Iraqis who were in the process of having their applications reviewed and even may Iraqis who had already had their applications accepted. George Packer, a well-known journalist and the author of a number of articles on the Iraqi refugee crisis and the resulting American answer to that crisis, wrote on his blog after the case had begun to affect the Iraqi refugee "pipeline". Packer said, "The Kentucky case has spooked the agencies and removed any incentive for jittery officials to do right by the Iraqis who, at unbelievable risk to themselves and their families, supported the U.S. during the long years of war" (Packer 2011). Just before the Iraqi case came out in the media, the US government overhauled their security screening process of refugees coming to the US. It is difficult to know whether the Departments of State and Homeland Security overhauled this process because of the case in Kentucky or

if the authorities already knew of the two Iraqis when the new system was put in place. Either way, the overall effect of the new security screening system was that it greatly reduced the number of Iraqis (US-affiliated and others) who were waiting to gain admission to the US resettlement program. For a period of a few months actually, the Iraqi resettlement program came almost to a complete halt. Iraqis inside of Iraq, Jordan, and Syria, who had gained admission to the US and had sold all their belongings and were prepared for departure were put on hold and forced to wait indefinitely because of the new security screening system in place. Stories such as this abound (Human Rights First 2010; Arango 2011; Packer 2011). Packer states, "Multiply these brief stories by the thousands, and you have one of the most disgraceful legacies of the decade since September 11$^{th}$ – a scandal that has only grown worse during the Obama years" (Packer 2011).

While the new security screening system affected the admission rates of Iraqi refugee resettlement US-affiliated resettlement, there were other factors that affected the success of the Special Immigrant Visa Program. When the SIV program was passed in 2008 allotting 5000 slots per year (for five years) through 2012, it was viewed as a major achievement in the effort to aid as many of the US-affiliated Iraqis as possible. The success of the Special Immigrant Visa program, however, was premeditated. Of the 25,000 available slots offered through 2012, only 8,626 have been granted through June

of 2013[13]. Part of the reason for this staggeringly low number is, of course, the sluggishness and inadequacies of the new security screening process, but, more importantly, the program is hindered by the byzantine application process. The application process itself consists of five major steps, each of them taking weeks and/or months to complete: 1) approval from the Chief of Mission (COM) at the US embassy in Baghdad; 2) submission of DHS-USCIS application by regular mail to the DHS's Nebraska Service Center where, if it is approved, must be adjudicated by USCIS officials and then it is sent to the State Department's National Visa Center; 3) National Visa Center Processing which requires multiple original documents from the applicant in Iraq including Iraqi military records, evidence the individual worked for the US government, a police certificate from the locality where the individual lived if they resided outside of Iraq for more than 6 months, photographs, and additional documents if they want to receive benefits in the US; 4) Visa interview at the local US consulate where the applicant must have all the original documents mentioned above; and 5) security clearance which, as described previously, requires the attention of multiple US agencies and can take up to a year to clear (Human Rights First 2010, 32).

This process, as well as the security screening process, is a reminder of the extreme tactics of control and exclusion of the US government upon the US refugee program. Without undermining the fact that the US *was* helping to resettle thousands of

[13] Iraqi SIV arrival data provided by the Refugee Processing Center which is operated by the U.S. Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, http://www.wrapsnet.org/Home/tabid/52/Default.aspx

Iraqi refugees, in the case of US-affiliated Iraqis, the US was not coming close to accepting and resettling the numbers promised. Among Iraqi refugees being referred through the UNHCR, rejections were high as well. While security is obviously an important element in resettling any individual to the US, the US has failed to aid thousands of innocent Iraqis, both US-affiliated Iraqis and non-affiliated ones, whose lives are in danger because of a war waged by the US itself. Security is important but this is a case where a country's security fears and desire for control over human mobility are out of sync with the realities and dangers on the ground for Iraqi refugees.

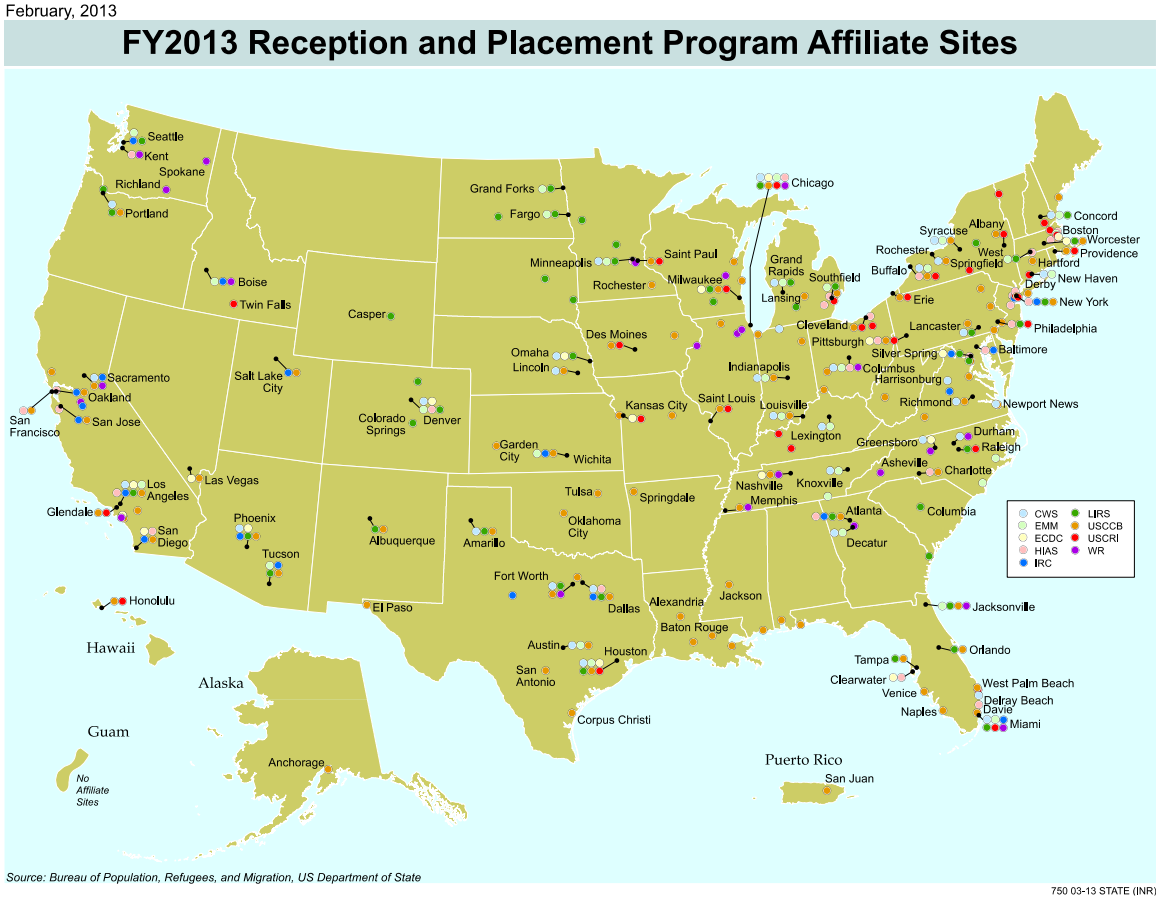
Mobility is also an issue that plays a major role in the lives of Iraqis who *did* arrive to the US through either the SIV or USRP programs. Aspects of mobility, or lack thereof, will be covered in more detail in the next chapter but first, it is important to look at where Iraqis were being resettled within the US. One of the changes brought about by the US Refugee Act in 1980 was the expansion of networks of non-profit organizations assisting refugees from around the world with resettlement in the US. Therefore, while many refugees arriving to this country throughout the 1970's resettled to major urban centers such as New York, Los Angeles, and Chicago, refugees are now being dispersed around the country to much smaller locales where a non-profit refugee resettlement organization is located. The system is deigned this way much for the same reason that Sweden was discouraged that other countries in Europe and around the world weren't accepting Iraqi refugees: to help shoulder the responsibility and cost of admitting thousands of displaced people. So, in the context of US resettlement, instead of a few

major cities resettling hundreds or possibly thousands of refugees, many smaller cities can begin to share in this process and admit and aid refugees in the resettlement process in their own communities.

The process for determining where in the US a refugee will be placed is, of course, complex. Despite popular belief, most refugees coming to the US actually have very little say as to where in the country they will be resettled. After an individual's full screening process is completed by the various agencies and the US has agreed to admit that person to the US for resettlement, the names of all the individuals who will be arriving are sent to a group of US based (and often religiously affiliated) organizations which are referred to as voluntary agencies (volags). There are currently nine voluntary agencies that have a cooperative agreement with the US government to aid in the resettlement process. Examples of these agencies are Church World Service (CWS), Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM), Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services (LIRS), International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), to name a few. These voluntary agencies in turn contract with various local resettlement organizations throughout the US (like Refugee Services of Texas, see figure 4.3) which work with the actual refugees on the ground from their date of arrival to the end of their allotted service period (to be covered further in the next chapter). Each year the voluntary agencies determine a number of refugees that is within their capacity to resettle based on the number of local agencies they work with, the number of staff and programs within each of the local offices, etc. These annual

resettlement numbers are provided to the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration as well as the Department of Health and Human Service's Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), which then helps the US government determine how many refugees from around the world they will be able to resettle annually.

Figure 4.3 Map of Volag Affiliate Sites in the US




There is a weekly meeting held between members of each of these voluntary agencies and officials from the Department of State with a list of names of refugees who have been granted admission to be resettled in the US. During this meeting, each case is reviewed individually and certain important characteristics are taken into consideration

on the part of the refugee as well as on the part of the local agencies with which each of these volags works. Examples of these considerations include existing family members in the US, possible pre-determined sponsorship of a refugee, medical issues, etc. The only time a refugee is able to "choose" his/her location of resettlement is if that person has a "sponsor" – someone they know in the US who has agreed by contract to help in the resettlement of that individual – or if that person has immediate family members already living in the US. In that case, the arriving refugee will be sent to wherever their immediate family members are living. Amazingly, extended family living in the US is often not considered when deciding where to place a refugee individual or family.

After the specific characteristics of the refugee individual/family are explored and considered, the volags then look to the characteristics of their local agencies "in the field". For example, at Refugee Services of Texas in Austin, there is a program named Greenleaf, which is funded to support the mental health of refugees being resettled by that agency, if they choose to use it. So, when reviewing a case that has been admitted to the US for resettlement, if, in that individual's case file there is evidence of mental or psychological issues, RST would be considered as a destination for that person due to the existence of the Greenleaf program. There are a number of advantages and disadvantages to this system that will be explored in more detail in the next chapter but, on a whole, the placement system often puts refugees in unexpected and unknown locations while at the same time greatly reducing their mobility once they are in the US and their ability to successfully integrate into the society/community to which they have been sent.

Finally, in regards to the journey to the US from the country of asylum (or, in the case of some Iraqis, from Iraq itself), there is a system set up to help refugees actually travel to the US. After a refugee case has been accepted for admittance by the US refugee program, travel arrangements are then made in coordination with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) who acts in this case much like a travel agency for the refugees. The IOM will receive the new refugee admissions information and begin to book travel for the refugees and their families. IOM has staff at many major international airports to help groups of refugees reach their final destination. When booking the airline tickets for each new refugee traveling to the US, the IOM pays for the tickets. Upon arrival to the US, however, refugees are expected to pay back the travel loans (interest free) to the IOM. While paying back this loan is can in many situations be yet one more major barrier during the resettlement process, the system set up for refugees' journey to the US in coordination with the IOM has some benefits. Unlike most refugees in Europe, who arrive as asylum seekers and who must use their own resources and who often have to employ the use of smugglers to make the very dangerous journey, refugees coming to the US with IOM travel grants are able to arrive in this country relatively safely. While the US should invest more in its resettlement program to help pay for journey to this country, it is beneficial that the journey itself is not one full of unnecessary dangers.

Regardless of the process by which refugees are placed spatially within the US, Iraqis, while being resettled in cities and towns throughout the country, have been

clustered in a few different areas. Some of this has to do with the high level of sponsorship for US-affiliated Iraqis (as they worked with Americans while in Iraq) but also with the location of immediate family members. Many others, however, were placed wherever there were open spots available. Figure 4.4 illustrates the spatial variation of how Iraqis are dispersed throughout the US.

Figure 4.4 numbers of Iraqi refugees resettled in the US by state from FY 2007-FY 2013 (q3)

| | Refugee | SIV |
|---|---|---|
| **Alabama** | 365 | 43 |
| **Alaska** | 22 | 2 |
| **Arizona** | 5,587 | 378 |
| **Arkansas** | 37 | 9 |
| **California** | 20,242 | 1,001 |
| **Colorado** | 1,132 | 294 |
| **Connecticut** | 713 | 78 |
| **Delaware** | 8 | 0 |
| **District of Columbia** | 112 | 20 |
| **Florida** | 1,638 | 254 |
| **Georgia** | 1,804 | 143 |
| **Hawaii** | 4 | 0 |
| **Idaho** | 961 | 46 |
| **Illinois** | 5,293 | 404 |
| **Indiana** | 305 | 63 |
| **Iowa** | 458 | 35 |
| **Kansas** | 225 | 13 |
| **Kentucky** | 1,552 | 135 |
| **Louisiana** | 336 | 45 |
| **Maine** | 390 | 36 |
| **Maryland** | 1,007 | 206 |
| **Massachusetts** | 2,903 | 172 |
| **Michigan** | 13,836 | 412 |
| **Minnesota** | 605 | 85 |

Figure 4.4 (continued)

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Mississippi** | 13 | 13 |
| **Missouri** | 1,242 | 229 |
| **Montana** | 8 | 0 |
| **Nebraska** | 336 | 147 |
| **Nevada** | 525 | 31 |
| **New Hampshire** | 363 | 7 |
| **New Jersey** | 573 | 46 |
| **New Mexico** | 339 | 41 |
| **New York** | 2,447 | 196 |
| **North Carolina** | 1,252 | 284 |
| **North Dakota** | 441 | 23 |
| **Ohio** | 1,696 | 149 |
| **Oklahoma** | 177 | 47 |
| **Oregon** | 765 | 99 |
| **Pennsylvania** | 1,820 | 188 |
| **Rhode Island** | 125 | 9 |
| **South Carolina** | 169 | 50 |
| **South Dakota** | 237 | 12 |
| **Tennessee** | 1,817 | 437 |
| **Texas** | 7,072 | 1,792 |
| **Utah** | 1,133 | 82 |
| **Vermont** | 132 | 6 |
| **Virginia** | 2,777 | 515 |
| **Washington** | 2,202 | 286 |
| **West Virginia** | 40 | 6 |
| **Wisconsin** | 621 | 57 |
| **Total** | 87,857 | 8,626 |

*Source: Refugee Processing Center, http://www.wrapsnet.org*

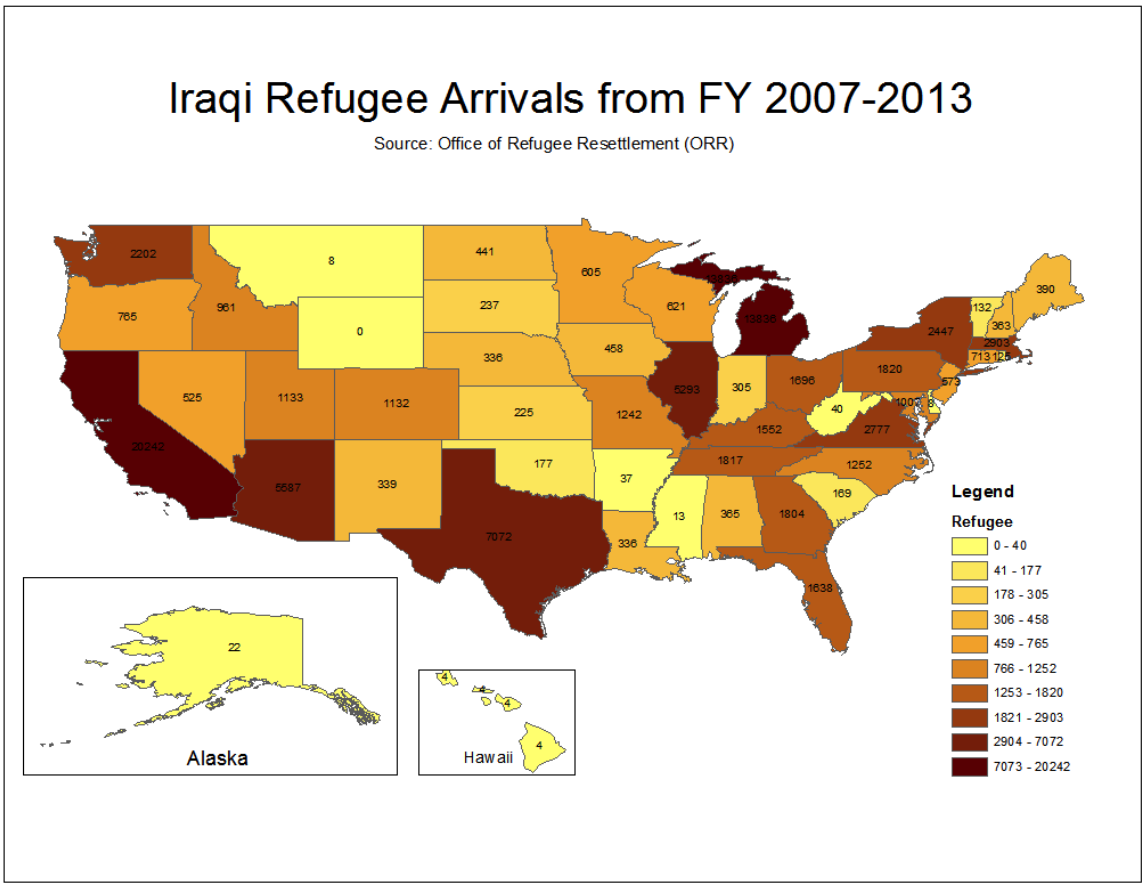
By looking at this table, one can see that while Iraqis were resettled in every state (except for Wyoming, which resettles an extremely small number of refugees), California, Michigan, Texas, Illinois, and Arizona are the main destinations for this refugee population. Interestingly, out of the 20,000 Iraqis resettling in California, almost half of

those are Chaldean Christian Iraqis who have resettled in a suburb of San Diego called El Cajon. Michigan, the state with the second highest number of Iraqi refugees, has a long history of Arab populations moving and/or resettling there. Texas has the third highest number of Iraqi refugees since 2007 and the vast majority have settled in either Houston, Dallas/Ft. Worth, San Antonio, and Austin.

Before a more detailed discussion in the next chapter about the policies and processes of the local resettlement agency, Refugee Services of Texas in Austin, it is important to note that the resettlement experience of refugees is highly diverse from one state to another and one city to another. Part of this experience depends on the refugees themselves of course and the specific skills they bring with them, but it also depends on the largely on the place/community to which they resettle *and* the local agency. While the main government funding programs that provide the local agencies with the necessary grants are, for the most part, standard from one state to another (with slight exceptions), the inner workings of the agencies themselves are quite different.

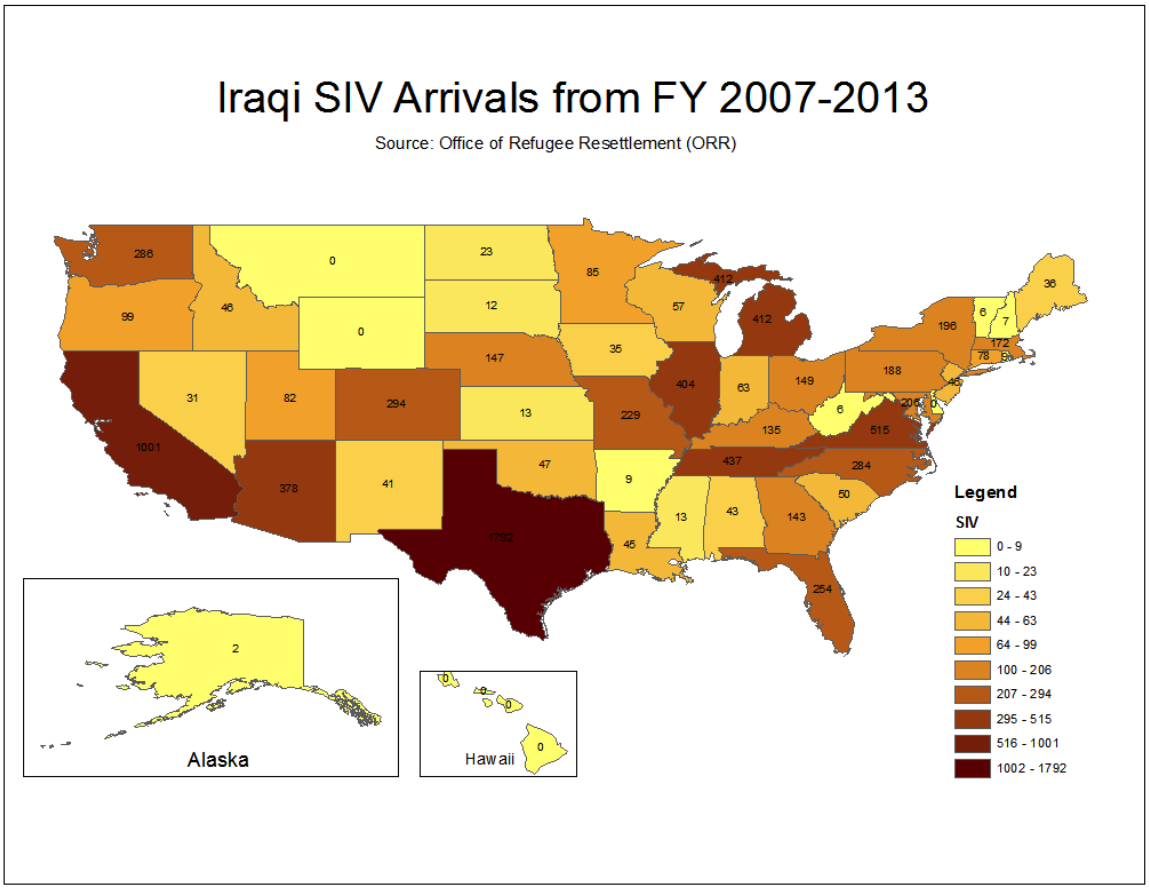
With so many Iraqis resettling in diverse locales across the US, their experience of resettlement and integration are extremely diverse as well. While this chapter has striven to illustrate issues of state control and exclusion when it comes to forcibly displaced populations, and specifically how those characteristics play out in the admissions process of Iraqis to the US, the next chapter will turn to the issue of integration. Specifically, it will deal with the experiences of integration and resettlement of Iraqi refugees arriving to Austin, Texas from 2007-2012.

Figure 4.5 Map of Iraqi Refugee Arrivals to US, 2007-2013




*Map created by Xuebin Yang*

Figure 4.6 Map of Iraqi SIV arrivals to US, 2007-2013




*Map created by Xuebin Yang*

# Chapter 5: "Finding Your Own Way": Local Integration of Iraqi Refugees in Austin, Texas

With over 85,000 Iraqi refugees having resettled in the US since 2005, there still has been very little published on their experiences in this country. Much can be learned however from their stories as local governments, local communities, and even the federal government has much to gain from a better understanding not just of refugee integration in general terms, but specifically of the integration of large Arab/Muslim populations during a time of upheaval in the Arab world and of concern and misunderstandings of Arab/Islamic culture and society here at home. The type of refugee for which this study pertains is one who differs in various ways from other types of migrants and even from other types of refugees, those who sought asylum in Europe and travelled there using their own resources, for example. As detailed in the previous chapter, this study deals with refugees who have been referred to the United States from overseas and, after being admitted, takes part in the state controlled and multi-agency coordinated process of third country resettlement. In this context, refugees coming to the US have vastly different migratory experiences than other types of migrants. These differences lie primarily in three distinct realms: 1) the actual process of migrating or the travelling experience, 2) the decision making process concerning their destination, and 3) their experience of *integrating* into the host society as they often (depending on the policies of the host country) qualify for and receive special types of resettlement benefits and welfare,

particularly because they carry the status of refugees. Integration is a controversial term, however, which requires defining.

This chapter will look in detail at the concept of integration and how it pertains first to refugees and then specifically to other Arab/Muslim populations that have resettled elsewhere in the world. The chapter will then turn to the concept of mobility and how it relates to US refugee policy, which can either help or hinder the experience of refugees resettling here. Finally, the chapter will utilize primary data collected for this project to analyze the resettlement and integration experience of Iraqi refugees admitted to the US, and to Austin, Texas in particular.

## 5.1 Refugee integration: Definitions and Discussion

### 5.1.1 A Brief Case Study of Iraqi Integration in Austin, TX

I have had the opportunity to observe the process of refugee resettlement and integration first hand through my experience volunteering with a single Iraqi refugee family in Austin, TX since their arrival in 2008. Before going into a broader discussion about the term integration and the theories, debates, and studies surrounding it, I want to recount bits of my experience with this family in order to more fully elaborate the differences between refugee integration and the integration of other types of migrants. It should be noted, however, that the experience of this particular family is not representative of all refugee integration experiences in the US. While many other Iraqi refugees and refugees of other nationalities and ethnic groups *do* certainly share similarities to this family's experience, it will be noted in the paper when and where other

legal-political refugees have very different encounters with and understandings of resettlement and integration. However, outlining what this family has faced points out many important facets of the refugee integration and resettlement process, which are experienced by a wide range of refugees in the US and elsewhere.

The family with whom I have done volunteer work consists of four people: a mother, father, son, and daughter. The son and daughter are both in their late 20's and the mother and father are both in their 60's. The family is from Baghdad; they were part of the Christian community there; a community which has dwindled to very low numbers over the past few years. They eventually fled Iraq in 2005 due to threats against them because of their religious beliefs. From Baghdad, they fled to Amman, Jordan where they applied for refugee status with the United Nations and where they waited to be resettled for more than two years. After using their family savings for living expenses and receiving financial help from other family members who live in various parts of the world (a number of their extended family fled Iraq during and following the first Gulf War and are now living in various Western countries such as Australia and Holland) they were resettled in the United States. Their resettlement came about through the coordinated efforts of the UNHCR, the International Organization for Migration, US Office of Refugee Resettlement, and one of the many charitable Christian organizations that work in concert with a large network of local non-profit organizations around the US.

When the family arrived at the New York airport, they were still unaware of where exactly they were going to be sent within the US. They had expressed a desire to US and UN officials to be resettled in the Detroit area, which has a large population of Arabs and Iraqi refugees in particular. For whatever reason, this was not possible and they were told that they were being sent to Austin, TX, a place they knew nothing about, not even its location in relation to other places and states in the US. This decision was made even though they had family members who had already been resettled in two other states in the US. Nonetheless, they were sent to Austin where there was, at the time, a very small population of Iraqi refugees and Arabic-speaking people in general. At the time of their arrival to Austin, according to one of the employees at Caritas, one of two organizations helping to resettle refugees in the city, there were approximately 8-10 other Iraqi refugees living here.

Upon their arrival at the airport, for which I was present, it was apparent that none of the family members spoke English but for a few words. Moreover, the father, who is overweight, was experiencing serious health problems. The family was brought to their apartment in Austin which had been sparsely furnished and stocked with food items by Caritas volunteers, many of which they were unfamiliar with. The apartment complex where they were placed is occupied primarily by Latino immigrants, is mediocre in terms of its quality, is very reasonably priced, and is in a fairly central location within the city. As refugees, the family is eligible for federal financial assistance for a given time and this assistance is handled by the resettlement organization, in this case Caritas. Without

going into full detail about the aid packages (more detail will be provided below), the family receives full support for a total of eight months. Thus, their rent is paid, they receive food stamps, the elderly parents receive state supplemental security income (SSI), monthly bus passes, and a small stipend for other expenses such as phone and electricity bills. During this eight month period, they are expected to become "self-sufficient" (a key word in government sponsored refugee resettlement literature) to where, at the end of the eight month period, they can live without the assistance of the federal government and local organizations. To help achieve self-sufficiency, the local resettlement organization offers free English classes three times per week, helps with finding employment, offers some translating services (although for Arabic, these services are very limited in Austin), and when possible, provides volunteers such as myself who are labelled "community advocates". These volunteers are assigned to a single family with whom they will work for up to a year to help them in any capacity with the ultimate goal being self-sufficiency.

Since the family's arrival, the son has found a decent-paying hourly wage job at a local hotel/restaurant. The mother and father have experienced a number of health issues for which they have had numerous doctors' appointments. Further, their age, level of education, and persistent health issues has, despite their best efforts, kept them from learning more than the most basic conversational English. The daughter, the best educated member of the family, has not looked for work so as to help her mother and father with their health issues and to more generally be the member of the family to

negotiate the process of integration at all levels within the household such as scheduling appointments, dealing with the resettlement organization employees and processes, and navigating their way around town. The daughter has in the last couple of years, however, secured a position as a part-time "homecare health provider" for her parents through a state sponsored home nursing agency. Because of the age and health of the mother and the father, they continue to receive SSI checks, Medicaid, and food stamps, although the daughter no longer receives food stamps or has health insurance as the eight-month period of federal and local assistance is long over. Although the eight month period is over, the family is still not totally self-sufficient. One of the ironies of the process in terms of the language barrier is that to successfully learn the language, the daughter is not able to work, and since the son is working 40 or more hours per week, he is not able to successfully study the language in the classes provided by the local organization.

In terms of networks and connections within the community, this Iraqi family had none upon arrival, not counting the support of the local resettlement agency (notably their case worker) and myself. Not only was the community too small, but the persistence of ethnic tensions from Iraq continue even here in Austin. It was telling that the family had and continues to have no interest whatsoever in dealing with or forming relationships with Muslim Iraqi refugees in the community, or even other Christian Iraqis who have since made Austin their home. There has been some slight communication between the family and some of the other Iraqis in the community but it has been very limited, consisting mostly of sparse telephone conversations. The vast majority of their human

capital and support networks come from their family members in other parts of the US, Holland, and Sweden. The family has received financial support from family members in these places, in part to help in purchasing a computer which adds the monthly expense of internet service to their budget. Their computer allows them to communicate on a daily basis with their family members around the world, including Europe and Australia. More recently they have purchased a car, which allows them increased mobility and flexibility around the city.

Eight months after their arrival in the US, this family was far from the stated goal of self-sufficiency. This speaks to the difficulty of successfully integrating refugees under the current US resettlement paradigm. The case of this family highlights the fact that although refugees receive benefits for being refugees, they do not necessarily prosper from these benefits. Part of the reason seems to do with the paradox of language learning and finding employment. Another reason has to do with the slow, complex, and often ineffective state/local government bureaucracy. Almost every month the family experiences an unexpected and unexplained malfunction in the government offices overseeing the support services for either SSI checks, food stamps, or health care. Finally, couple this with other factors like the requirement for all refugees to make monthly payments to reimburse the cost of the airfare which brought them to the US and it makes for a very difficult transition and decreases the chances for a swift and successful integration into the host society.

A variety of the experiences described in this brief outline of a refugee family resettling in the United States illustrate some of the unique qualities of refugee integration as opposed to other migrant type integration. Such aspects include the location of resettlement, federal and local refugee assistance and services, and the wide and often illogical dispersal of friends and familial networks. Nevertheless, some of the broader theories of integration and assimilation in geography and other disciplines can be applied to the refugee experience. At the same time, scholars studying refugee issues have also conceived of frameworks and theories having to do specifically with refugee integration. These different theories and frameworks will be discussed below.

### 5.1.2 The Concept of Integration in Geography and Beyond

Integration can broadly be defined as, "The process through which immigrants and refugees become part of the receiving society" (Castles et al. 2001, 115). This definition is extremely vague, however, and does not cover the many nuances and contested meanings of the word itself. A number of scholars have suggested that while the term integration is often used, it is understood differently in different contexts (Robinson 1999; Castles et al. 2001). As Castles et al. state, "There is no single, generally accepted definition, theory or model of immigrant and refugee integration. The concept continues to be controversial and hotly debated" (Castles et al. 2001, 114). Other terms scholars, policy makers, and NGO workers have used in place or alongside of integration are assimilation, acculturation, adjustment, adaptation, incorporation, insertion, and inclusion. The abundance of terms used to describe the resettlement of

refugees in a new place serves to highlight the contestation over the term and the idea of integration in general. One idea that has become fairly integral in gaining a better understanding of integration, however, is that integration is a multi-dimensional two way process in which, to be successful, both the population arriving to a place and the host community must play a part in and be open to the resettlement process (Strang and Ager 2010; Lomba 2010). This paper ascribes to this aspect of integration; that successful integration (if that can be defined) requires both the participation of the host community (on various levels) and the refugee group as well. It also supports the notion that integration is a long-term process and one in which, to be successful, refugees eventually gain the ability to participate in all sectors of the host society (Gray et al. 2001; Johnston, Vasey, and Markovic 2009).

Many of the works recently within the field of geography having to do with migrant integration are concerned with the dual issues of race and gender (Wright, Ellis, and Parks 2005; Ellis and Wright 2005; Cooke 2008; Winders 2008; Dannecker 2009; Woltman and Newbold 2009). These issues do certainly relate to ideas and debates about immigrant integration and assimilation around the world. Other important theories which have formed or been elaborated upon within geography having to do with migrant integration and assimilation are heterolocalism, transnationalism, and networks of ethnicity. Heterolocalism (W. Zelinsky and Lee 1998) was formed in response to some of the older sociospatial theories of immigrant settlement and assimilation which came out of the Chicago School of Sociology in the first half of the 20th century (Park, Burgess,

and McKenzie 1925). Immigrant assimilation in terms of sociospatial settlement patterns were originally thought to be concentrated on two key variables: knowledge of the English language and level and subsequent increase in socioeconomic status (Hardwick 2008). Spatially, it was theorised that immigrants initially settled in less wealthy neighbourhoods in the inner city which were more densely concentrated with ethnic immigrant populations and communities. The densely populated immigrant areas would help increase an immigrant's chance of successful assimilation it was thought. The theory continued, stating that as their education levels and economic status rise, the immigrants would then move outward toward suburban areas of the city which were more affluent and whiter (W. Zelinsky and Lee 1998; Hardwick 2008). It was views such as this, where success was often equated with assimilation to a predominantly "white" location and identity that gave rise to critical race studies in population geography. And, breaking with the earlier sociospatial assimilation theories, Hardwick states, " today's suburban metropolis is a place where migrants from outside the US more often settle in a dispersed pattern during their earliest years of settlement instead of in immigrant-rich parts of the downtown area" (2008: 165).

Pointing out the various ways immigrant settlement patterns have changed in the US city and thus developing a new theory to explain these differences in the current spatial and temporal context is Zelinsky and Lee's (1998) main concern. As they state:

> A late 20th century phenomenon, heterolocalism is a function of the profound restructuring of the relationships within a globalising society among people, places, and social and economic entities. The term itself refers to recent populations of shared ethnic identity which enter an area from distant

> sources, then quickly adopt a dispersed pattern of residential location, all the while managing to remain cohesive through a variety of means (1998: 281).

Zelinsky and Lee stress that this framework does not have to be considered as only a local one. It can function at a regional, national, and/or international scale as well. Zelinsky and Lee's idea of heterolocalism is important as it illustrates that where an immigrant settles is no longer as important as it once was, especially within a single city, because of advances in transportation and communication. The authors point to five main characteristics of their model. The third variable, which deals with the issue of communication, states, "Despite the absence of spatial propinquity, strong ethnic community ties are maintained via telecommunications, visits, and other methods at the metropolitan, regional, national, and even international scale" (1998, 285). While the model of heterolocalsim may not be as relevant for legal-political refugees, as they do not usually choose their location of resettlement, it is applicable in that the wide dispersal of immigrant resettlement no longer necessarily has a negative impact on assimilation. This point is at once true and problematic. Heterolocalism assumes that embedded immigrant communities are no longer as important for immigrants as they can now connect and communicate over space. This is true as technological advances have certainly increased the ease of communication. It is difficult to imagine, however, that migrants (such as the refugee family in Austin) would not have an easier time integrating and reaching the goal of self-sufficiency if they were surrounded by a number of other Iraqis refugees, particularly Christian ones.

The model of heterolocalism shares a number of qualities with the theories of transnationalism and networks of ethnicity which also impact upon the lives of migrants and refugees. Transnationalism has become an often used term and concept in studies on migration not only in geography but in many social science disciplines. The idea of transnationalism in general, "necessitates a crossing of borders, both literal and epistemological" (Katharyne Mitchell 1997, 101). In this context Mitchell goes on to state that transnational movement is not limited simply to people, but also to capital, goods, information, culture, and ideology (1997, 101). Through this broad conceptualization of the term, it has become more than just a post-positivist critique of earlier migration studies (Smith and Bailey 2004). It has, due largely to the advancements in transportation and communication that Zelinsky and Lee (1998) highlighted, become somewhat of a paradigm in migration studies since it is now so much easier for migrants to travel and communicate across borders. In his discussion of transnational communities, Bailey defines them as "a set of intense, cross-border social relations that enable individuals to participate in the activities of daily life in two or more nations" (Bailey 2001, 413). The idea of transnationalism has been increasingly important in geography as it points to the possibility of migrants identifying with more than one space, or having multiple spatial identities (Herrmann, Risse-Kappen, and Brewer 2004; C. Nagel and Staeheli 2004). As Ley and Waters write, "Transnational migrants, who arrive at their destination without ever fully leaving their origin, represent another manifestation of the space of flows, for such sojourners have converted the

linearity of migration into the circularity of transnational movement" (Ley and Waters 2003, 104).

This idea of transnationalism, whether it be transnational flows of people, information, or money, has a profound effect upon migrant integration. The movement of money and information across borders allows for a higher possibility of the successful integration of migrants in the host community. The idea of "networks of ethnicity" which was first discussed by Mitchell (K. Mitchell 2000) is similar to the theory of transnationalism. The notion of networks of ethnicity, however, draws more heavily on the process and importance of the transfer of information, and, of course, a shared ethnicity. As Hardwick explains:

> These economic, social, and politically constructed networks may be internal (endogenous) social connections that are specific to one or more distinctive groups or external (exogenous) networks that provide newcomers linkages with the outside world. Networks of ethnicity enhance the transfer of information among family and friends, co-workers, and co-religionists, and social networks shared by migrants with similar backgrounds may also help to cushion the impact of adjusting to life in a new place (2008, 172).

It is evident through these concepts that they play an important role in discussions of integration within the wider field of migration studies. They are theories that can be easily be used for studies of various types of migrants, refugees or otherwise. Certainly, as is clear from the above case study of the Iraqi refugee family in Austin, the ideas of heterolocalism, transnationalism, and networks of ethnicity all play heavily into their integration experience. However, while the Iraqi family in Austin may be more dependent on networking links across state and national borders to reach their family and

friends, Iraqi refugees in a place like Detroit, which has a large embedded Arab and Iraqi community, may be better theorized within Zelinsky and Lee's heterolocal model. Although the concepts themselves overlap in certain ways, they also stress different important points: sociospatial patterns of settlement and assimilation, cross-border flows of people, capital, goods, and information, and the informational networks connecting migrants within a country or internationally.

Within refugee studies, Ager and Strang's two part article outlining and analyzing their conceptual framework on integration is useful for further understanding the concept from the perspective of refugees in particular (Ager and Strang 2008; Strang and Ager 2010). *The Journal of Refugee Studies* has offered a space for scholars doing research on refugees broadly, and legal-political refugees in particular, to publish on issues of integration specific to refugees around the world. Ager and Strang's framework offers a helpful model for testing whether or not a refugee's integration into a host society is "successful". After reviewing previous attempts to define the term and reviewing its related literature as well as doing primary fieldwork in areas of refugee resettlement in the United Kingdom, the authors identify a number of key elements, "central to perceptions of what constitutes 'successful' integration" (Ager and Strang 2008, 166). The four overall themes under which the elements of "successful" integration are organized are: achievement and access across the sectors of employment, housing, education, and health; assumptions and practice regarding citizenship and rights; processes of social connection within and between groups within the community; and

structural barriers to such connection related to language, culture, and the local environment. Although Ager and Strang's framework excludes the effect of transnational networks on refugee integration into host societies, it does offer a fairly comprehensive outline for which to measure the integration process in disparate places. Ager and Strang's focus on multiple and disparate aspects of integration allow for viewing the term not just as a process for policy makers to debate, but as a decisive *human experience* in the course of a refugee's life.

Ager and Strang's conceptualization of refuge integration is more detailed and comprehensive than Kibreab's (1999). The three main variables for Kibreab that affect refugee integration are attitudes of the host society, current policy environments, and employment opportunities. The interesting difference between Kibreab's integration framework and Ager and Strang's is that Kibreab's focuses much more on structure and much less on agency. It is evident from the first three aspects of Ager and Strang's model that they give the refugee much more credit in their (in)ability to make for themselves a successful integration experience. The last of the four characteristics of Ager and Strang's model, does account for "structural barriers" as they state, but the authors do not go in depth on the exact meanings of such barriers or the different varieties of barriers that may be faced by refugees. Furthermore, Ager and Strang's use of the word "barriers" implies that the structures in place in the host society are strictly negative. They do not consider any structures that may happen to be beneficial for refugee integration.

Kibreab's integration framework also has its positive and negative attributes. By focusing on structures, it stresses the importance of the role of place (particularly the place to which the refugee/migrant resettles) in affecting the integration process of the refugee. Other than the inclusion of employment opportunities, Kibreab's framework is vastly different from Ager and Strang's. His addition of current policy environments puts needed emphasis on one of the most important factors of legal-political refugee resettlement: the role of the state in those refugees' integration experience. Moreover, attitudes of the host society do play a role in the experiences and opportunities of incoming refugees. This can be exemplified currently in the United States concerning the issue of the Iraqi refugee crisis.

Inclusion of Iraqi refugees as one of the refugee groups to be admitted by the US was and continues to be an extremely slow process, largely due to the current post-9/11 geopolitical context that the US finds itself in concerning the war in Iraq, terrorism, and an overall public mistrust of Arab populations. This situation thus plays a role not only in number of Iraqi refugees who eventually are admitted to the US but also how they are subsequently (mis)treated by local populations in places of resettlement. Therefore, Kibreab's inclusion of this factor is useful as it provides another important variable left out of Ager and Strang's equation. However, Kibreab's framework omits elements which can often be crucial in a refugee's integration into the host society. The most important variable omitted here has to do with social networks, not only within the community but also around the country and internationally. Ager and Strang do mention

the importance of processes of social connection within and between groups in the community, but they limit their discussion to community networks and connections only. Both frameworks (Ager and Strang 2008; Kibreab 1999) need a more elaborate discussion on the various other types of connections and networks and their subsequent relevance towards refugee/migrant assimilation. These networks and communications can be crucial for the successful integration of refugees in a given place.

Two of the few geographers working on refugee integration/resettlement in the US, are Hume and Hardwick (Hume and Hardwick 2005). They use Kibreab's integration framework to investigate the resettlement and integration experiences of a variety of refugee groups in Portland, Oregon. One of their main concerns is the availability of networking and communication possibilities for these refugees in the Pacific Northwest. One main difference, however, in terms of their research participants is that they chose:

> …refugees from sub-Saharan Africa, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation as the focus of this study because their migration decision making has not been constrained by the US government's direct absorption policy, whereby certain groups of refugees were directed to particular settlement destinations. As such, these groups often make independent choices about migration and residential locations in consort with sponsors, resettlement agencies, social, political, and religious networks, and families and friends from home (Hume and Hardwick 2005, 191).

In doing this, Hume and Hardwick, while still studying refugee populations here in the US, are researching populations with much more spatial agency then other more recent refugee groups being admitted to the US. Through their study Hume and Hardwick find

that various types of networks within the community and internationally impact the resettlement experience of refugees. They stress the importance of ethno-religious networks, networks with the local social service agencies, and other community networks in not only helping the refugee to find employment and housing, but also in simply finding "the strength to carry on" (Hume and Hardwick 2005, 205).

There are many other works within the refugee studies literature which deal with the various aspects of the refugee integration experience. In 2010 a special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* focused specifically on integration. Within the issue, the articles dealt with topics such as citizenship and belonging (Strang and Ager 2010; Lomba 2010); policy as a structural barrier to integration in the UK (Mulvey 2010); marginalization and persistence of inequalities of refugee populations in Scandinavia (Valenta and Bunar 2010); deprofessionalization of skilled refugees (Smyth and Kum 2010); and challenges with health care (McKeary and Newbold 2010). There are numerous other works outside of this special journal issue that deal with the topic of refugee integration of course. Mestheneos and Loannindi (2002) discuss refugee integration in the European Union. Based on interviews with refugees in a number of different member states, they found that one of the major obstacles refugees faced in successfully integrating was the pronounced racism and ignorance of many Europeans towards the refugees. This point relates to one of the characteristics of Kibreab's integration framework which stresses the importance of the attitudes of the host society. Phillimore and Goodson (2008) use Ager and Strang's conceptual framework of

integration to show how integration indicators rarely stand alone, but rather impact one another and are interrelated. For example, they found in a number of instances throughout their research in the UK, that the inability to obtain good housing or the existence of health problems severely impacted a refugee's ability to progress in terms of employment or education. Dwyer (2010) was commissioned by the voluntary agency Church World Service (CWS) to write a paper about refugee integration in the United States. Interviewing numerous CWS staff members as well as staff at selected local resettlement agencies, Dwyer attempts to build towards a more comprehensive definition of integration in the context of refugees resettling within the current American resettlement paradigm and then provides numerous recommendations for a more sound resettlement and integration framework. Meanwhile, Fix (2007), writing about immigrant integration in general in the US, could easily be referring specifically to refugee integration when he states, "The integration of immigrants remains an afterthought in immigration policy discussions; in fact, integration remains one of the most overlooked issues in American governance. As a result, there is a mismatch between the nation's immigration policies – which, however broken, are on the whole comparatively generous – and the United State's immigrant integration policies that are ad hoc, under-funded, and skeletal. So today, as it has historically, the integration of newcomers is carried out by families, employers, churches, non-governmental organizations, and by an increasingly restive set of state and local governments" (2007, iii-iv). This ad hoc underfunded system of immigrant integration that Fix describes is

precisely the stated public-private partnership that the US refugee program is built upon. While some refugees do succeed under this system, there are many who fail to integrate under this paradigm.

It is interesting to note that the United States, unlike many "Western" counterparts, has no true national immigrant/refugee integration policy or procedures. As Dwyer states, "Despite decades of resettling refugees, the U.S. does not have a national policy on refugee integration that would outline clear goals, benchmarks and funding requirements, and even establish a formally accepted definition for integration" (2010, 3). The current US refugee integration paradigm is built upon the concept of self-sufficiency, which largely pertains to economic self-sufficiency. While economic independence is certainly an important characteristic to strive for, for any individual, it leaves much to be desired in terms of feeling and becoming a part of a country/city/community. Below, we will look in more detail at the idea of integration and self-sufficiency through the lens of a local resettlement agency in Austin and just a few of the Iraqi refugees who have resettled in Austin under this American resettlement paradigm.

# Chapter 6: Structure, Agency, and the Receiving Institutional Environment

As pointed out in the introductory chapter, I had the opportunity to work for 16 months at a local refugee resettlement agency in Austin, TX from mid-2009 to the end of 2010. Through this experience I was able to gain an in-depth knowledge of the policies and procedures of the United States Refugee Program on the "ground level". What I found, and what was echoed to me through multiple interviews with directors and staff from various local refugee agencies in Austin and through refugees themselves, was an extremely flawed and in some instances failing program where refugees and agency staff alike were facing seemingly insurmountable obstacles.

One of the words people often use to describe refugees is "survivors". Surviving war, violence, and discrimination in their home country and then surviving in refugee camps or (as is the case with many Iraqis) as refugees in urban areas is certainly remarkable. Resettlement in third countries, especially the US, is also about survival, albeit a different type of survival. Surviving in the US is a different game, the rules of which are largely unfamiliar to Iraqis and other refugee populations from different cultures and societies. In the refugee resettlement community, the ubiquitous term "self-sufficiency" has largely become synonymous with survival. Pipher, in her thoughtful work on refugee resettlement in the US, notes, "refugees may arrive penniless but they don't arrive resourceless. They carry their individual attributes, their histories, their families and their cultures" (2002, 69). Pipher then goes on to list what she calls the "12

attributes of resilience" which include factors such as energy and good health, ambition and initiative, and flexibility. These, as noted however, are individual attributes which are not carried by all and vary from one person to another. Resettlement experiences in the US, and surely the world over, are thus extremely variegated from person to person. Surviving, achieving self-sufficiency, and successfully integrating into a country, city, and community differs from person to person and therefore cannot be easily assessed or defined. What can be assessed however, is, first, the structure of the policy environment to which all refugees are resettling. Refugee benefits are the same for everyone no matter their background or the specific attributes they bring with them. A second characteristic that can be assessed and analyzed in the variegated process are the stories of refugees. While every story is different to an extent, themes and patterns do begin to present themselves. While some of these stories come from one on one interviews with the refugees themselves, they also come from daily journals kept during the period in which I was working at the local resettlement agency.

### 6.1 ALI'S STORY[14]

In the middle of 2010, RST received assurances for 3 single Iraqi males to arrive in Austin. One of these Iraqis, according to his biographical data, suffered from some mental health issues but no real details were given on the state of his disorder. When Ali arrived with the other two Iraqis, RST set up an apartment for the three of them to live as

[14] All names have been changed to protect respondents' privacy and confidentiality

roommates. Ali was a Palestinian from Iraq (see chapter 3 for a discussion of the refugee situation of the Palestinian population in Iraq) and he was known to some of the other Palestinian Iraqis who had resettled in Austin as they had lived with him in the camp. They had heard through friends that he was to be resettled in Austin and before his arrival had often joked about the thought of his living in the US and attempting to integrate to life here.

Ali was certainly not the first refugee to come through RST's doors with a mental health disorder. For sure, many refugees from all different backgrounds suffer from mental health issues, whether those issues are related to past traumatic events or to the difficult transition to life in the US, or both. Additionally, RST as a resettlement agency was somewhat unique from other agencies in that it houses a program formerly called the Greenleaf Program which was funded from outside grants (not federal grants) to provide mental health counseling services to refugees. Because of the presence of the Greenleaf program, RST receives assurances for a disproportionally large amount of refugees with known mental health issues. While the Greenleaf program is extremely valuable and necessary for many refugees, mental health issues unfortunately do not warrant increased benefits or services which are not available to all other refugee clients. Furthermore, many refugees, even if they struggle with mental health disorders, refuse to utilize the services and counseling offered by Greenleaf because of extreme differences in the way that mental health treatment is viewed and treated in other cultures and societies. Finally, because benefits or services do not differ for the most part for those that suffer from

mental health issues, RST resettlement and employment program workers are still expected to help these refugees achieve self sufficiency the same as any other refugee, which can be challenging to say the least.

After Ali's arrival, RST immediately started getting complaints from his roommates about strange behavior which they did not know how to deal with. Ali himself did not speak English, had no employment history, did not come with any family members, had little to no education, and then, of course, had known mental health issues which would certainly make life more difficult for anyone, no matter their background or nationality. Ali received the full amount of benefits and services from RST and went through the program without success in finding a job. When I left RST Ali was being enrolled in the Extended Case Management program at RST, which, according to RST's website, "provides long-term case management services for clients with emergency needs and difficulties acclimating to their new environment. The program focuses on resolving barriers to self-sufficiency by promoting self-reliance, accessing services within the community, and advocating on behalf of clients"[15]. I knew this would be a difficult task for the extended case management team. While there are services in Austin for low income populations with mental health disorders, the availability of services for those who don't speak English is limited. Those services become even more limited when it is for clients who only speak Arabic, not to mention that Ali speaks the Iraqi dialect of colloquial Arabic, not a dialect every Arabic speaking person is able to fully speak or

[15] http://refugeeservicesoftexas.org/locations/austin/

understand. Moreover, most non profit organizations in Austin and certainly throughout the US, do not have the funding for translating services for clients such as Ali. This leaves Ali with very few options for services outside of RST and with extremely limited funding. The Extended Case Management program at RST, while it does provide advocacy and help in navigating other services in the community does not offer additional funding for refugees in need unfortunately. And, like most other programs at refugee resettlement agencies nationwide, the Extended Case Management team consists only of one person with possibly hundreds of refugees who have applied for its services.

By the time Ali's services with RST were coming to an end, his roommates were moving out of the apartment (as they had fulfilled their lease agreement) and finding new living arrangements on their own. Upon leaving RST and in the days and months that followed I often wondered what happened to Ali. Only a few months ago, while serving food to the homeless at a local church, I saw Ali come through the line to receive food. I have since seen him interacting with other homeless individuals downtown.

The purpose of conveying this story is not to argue that the US should not have resettled this individual or other individuals like him. Indeed, they should admit him for resettlement in the US. The purpose of this story is instead to expose some of the failings in the American resettlement system which, I believe, could be resolved. Additionally, I would argue not that the resettlement agency failed him, as he may believe it did, but that he was failed by a flawed national resettlement paradigm. I would argue as well that RST did everything possible for Ali with the resources that they had and even going

above and beyond in searching for more resources that RST *did not* have. There are many anti-immigration refugee-focused blogs that seize on stories such as Ali's and use them to promote views which often center around the idea that the refugee resettlement program is broken to the point that it should be cut off from government funding streams and, more importantly from tax payers pockets. In no way am I suggesting that this example should lead to cutting off the US Refugee Program, nor to decreasing the number of refugees in order to more adequately fund the refugees that do come here. Ali's story is meant to highlight the fact that there are many refugees that come to the US with little to no "attributes of resilience". There are some, whether individuals or families, that need more than the allotted government benefits, that need extra help to survive. Even refugees who arrive to the US with skills, language, and other various attributes often need more time and more funding to gain self sufficiency and to successfully integrate into the receiving society. Many refugees need realistic long term services to have a chance at successful integration, not simply services based upon a short term, "in and out" resettlement program. With this example in mind, let us turn now to the various financial benefits that refugees are eligible for upon arrival to the US.

### 6.2 Financial Benefits for Refugees in the US

Upon arrival to the US, refugees are eligible to receive financial benefits for a specified amount of time. It should be noted here that the benefits programs explained in this section are specific to Texas and to the way these benefits were administered to refugees at Refugee Services of Texas during the period that I worked there in 2009-

2010. Benefits programs differ slightly from state to state and even from agency to agency within a single state in the manner that they are administered. The vast majority of funding for resettlement agencies and thus for refugees themselves comes through federal and state funding streams. This, to an extent, is in opposition to the so-called public-private partnership in which the American refugee resettlement program is based upon. While resettlement agencies do receive some support (financial and material) from outside grants, churches, and in some cases individuals, resettlement agencies for the most part are almost totally dependent on federal funding and federal programs. As one local area resettlement agency employee pointed out during an interview:

> There are 371 affiliates [local resettlement agencies] now nationwide and I'm gonna say that roughly 85% of them operate on a budget that is 85% federal funds. Private funding is just so minimal. I know of another agency in the area which is 33% private funding and that is considered high. Maybe my knowledge isn't good in general in terms of non-profits and how much of their funding is private versus public but for refugee resettlement agencies…they are completely dependent on PRM and ORR. (Respondent 12)

This reliance on government funding has had a detrimental impact on refugee resettlement agencies as it has reduced the amount of benefits and thus the amount of help they are able to offer vulnerable populations here in the US. This is not to say that the financial resources provided by the state and federal government isn't necessary. For sure, refugee resettlement would not be possible without the federal governments cooperation and financial support. Their strict and majority control over the resettlement programs, however, especially at a local level can oftentimes restrict the flexibility of

local agencies in dealing with ever-changing realities "on the ground". The same agency employee makes note of this when asked what she needed to help her face the challenges of her job:

> …giving the technical training to diversify funding, coming out and talking about fundraising, how to do fundraisers, how to market your agency, how to talk to private foundations and donors in the community. It's still so church based and the church thing is from the late 70's, it was even before the Refugee Act in 1980. It's not functional anymore. I don't have a need for pots and pans and clothes and sheets anymore. I have a need for emergency rent, I have a need for wheelchairs, I have a need for vocational training, I have a need for daycare. I mean, its gotten a bit better with the per cap increase but the whole structure of the program has changed, its ever evolving and we are still using these really old tools. So I just try to muddle through it myself and figure it out and you make a lot of mistakes along the way so its self-defeating and exhausting…we go to these conferences and we hear from the federal partners, "it's a private public partnership, you have to do your part with the private sector", but with what and how? (Respondent 12)

What is learned from this particular passage is that not only are "we still using these really old tools" but there is also a lack of knowledge and training about how to diversify the tools, especially for funding, at the local levels. Nevertheless, one of the main and most important aspects of the USRP program for newly arriving refugees are the various financial benefits programs. These programs will be explored below.

The first type of funding which all arriving refugees are eligible for and which all refuges "receive" is what is known as USRP funds and is sometimes referred to as "per capita" funding. Each individual that is admitted to the US as a refugee is allotted a pre-determined amount of money the amount of which is set by the government. When I first arrived to work at RST in June of 2009, the per capita income for each refugee was $450

per person. This money is available to the local resettlement agency before the arrival of the refugee individual or family and is used by the agency for a number of goods and services for that individual. For example, when the local agency receives the assurance from the national organizations (in RST's case either Episcopal Migration Ministries (EMM) or Church World Service (CWS)) and the date of arrival, the agency must approve it and sign off on it stating that they will be responsible for resettling the individual. This assurance is usually (but certainly not always!) received about 2-3 months before the date of arrival. Then, about 1-2 weeks before the refugee's arrival, different members of the agency must make a number of preparations. The main preparation that needs to be made is securing an apartment for the individual or group. Additionally, the agency must set up all services (namely electric and gas) and pay the deposit for all these services as well as for the apartment. Moreover, the apartment must be properly furnished based on the age(s) and gender(s) of the individual or family. All of these preparations are paid for using the per capita income of the refugees. For example, for a married couple arriving in July of 2009, they would have a total of $900 to pay for their apartment deposit, electric deposit, pro-rated first month rent, food for the apartment upon arrival and all other items and furnishings (i.e. large furniture, towels, sheets, mattresses, bed frames, pots, pans, glasses, etc.) which are necessary and required by government contract for the apartment. After adding up the cost of all of these services and items, the vast majority of the couples' $900 would be spent before they had even arrived. Oftentimes, during this period, many of the furnishings and smaller items

for the apartment were donated by church groups (one of the few ways in which the public-private partnership was actually occurring) and in these cases some of the per capita funding could feasibly be saved for later use. At $450 per person, a family of six would be in a better financial situation than a married couple even, since they would need a larger apartment, if the pro-rated first month's rent would be higher. With $2700, however, as opposed to $900 the agency could do quite a bit more with that money, especially in having the ability to use it post-arrival on rent, food, and other necessities.

Regardless of the size of the family and how much money they were allotted for the USRP per capita income, these were very difficult times for refugees resettling in the US due largely to the economic recession and the lack of jobs. This was compounded by the fact that in the second half of 2009 refugees (especially those from Iraq) were arriving at an increasingly high rate. As explained in the previous chapter, it took quite some time for the US refugee program to coordinate the program and process by which it would begin to process, admit, and resettle thousands of Iraqi refugees out of the Middle East. At the same time and in the same manner, it took the US refugee program quite some time to disperse the necessary funding to local resettlement agencies to appropriately staff their offices for the increase in arrivals. At that time in 2009, for example, the RST office in Austin was staffed to resettle 280 refugees in that fiscal year. Nevertheless, it resettled 395 people. The high number of arrivals with a low number of staff (who are underpaid) creates an unmanageable workload and leads, in many cases, to burn out and high staff turnover. These two thinga are, of course, detrimental to the newly arrived refugees who

depend on their caseworkers and other agency staff members to help them through this very difficult and crucial period of physical, cultural, and psychological transition. These characteristics, coupled with one of the worst economic recessions of the past 75 years, and insufficient USRP funding made refugee resettlement possibly disastrous for many of the refugees. This period was described by a few of the Iraqi refugees I interviewed (who arrived during that time). Here is one example from an Iraqi who arrived to Austin in the first half of 2009:

> The time I came through RST in 2009 it was really terrible. For example, there was no caseworker. The caseworker had quit a week before I arrived. So the director was my caseworker. And she was always busy. Each time I had to go somewhere, they gave me a map and I was using the bus on my own. Nobody showed me how to use the bus or read the map. So each time, like if I was going to grocery store…and especially the refugee clinic, I had a terrible time finding that. And nobody showed me how to get there. They would say, "just use bus #9" and I remember 3 hours walking in that neighborhood where the clinic is. My wife and kid were crying. 3 hours. I didn't know how to get back to my home. Plus there wasn't enough money and food, 2 days with no food. The food they put in the fridge was not enough to make a meal. I depended on volunteers. A volunteer lady saved me. But I think it has improved a lot. (Respondent 2)

This excerpt from the interview reveals the severity of the situation in 2009. The combination of high arrivals and insufficient staff and funding created a situation that left people and families feeling lost, literally and figuratively.

The Iraqi who I spoke to in this interview had a very small family and he spoke English so his outlook upon arriving to the US was possibly more optimistic than some. Take, for example, a Somali family I worked with who arrived to Austin in early 2009. The father of this family did not speak English and had eight children. As resettlement

coordinator in late 2009, I was asked to meet with a number of the Somali refugees who had resettled through RST during that time. They wanted to express to me some of their concerns about their resettlement experiences to that point. Some of the most upsetting complaints came from the Somali father of 8. He spoke about his difficulties in finding a job, his family often not having enough food to eat, and the poor living conditions at his apartment complex. Many refugees come to the US with extremely high expectations about what life will be like here. Wanting a job, food to eat, and decent housing, however, is not asking a lot and should have been easily accessible to all refugees arriving in the US.

One of the reasons that there were refugees without enough food in 2009 was due in large part to what was referred to in the office as the "Texas food stamp crisis". One of the first things that has to be done upon a refugee's arrival is to refer them to the state Department of Health and Human Services for food stamps and Medicaid benefits. This can't be done before their arrival, even if an individual has been assured because their signature is required on the application. Once a refugee has received their food stamp card, the food stamps benefits for refugees in Texas are actually quite generous. However, in 2009, it was taking the state offices that administer the food stamp paperwork between 20 and 60 days to process the applications and send out the food stamp cards. It usually took around 30 days. The applications for food stamps and Medicaid are very long. It is very easy either for a staff member at a resettlement agency or at the state office to make a mistake in filling out the application or while processing it.

If even a minor mistake was made it could possibly lengthen the wait for the food stamps dramatically. There were a handful of cases which actually took almost six months for the clients to receive their benefits. There were myriad other problems that could arise with the food stamps as well. The Somali family of 9 referred to above, for example, received their initial food stamp cards fairly quickly. The cards were, for some unknown reason, cut off earlier than they were supposed to be. The caseworker for this family tried diligently to renew their food stamps in a timely manner but because of the unbelievably slow pace of the food stamp office bureaucracy, it took weeks. To make matters worse, the father of the family could not secure employment despite the constant work of the employment team in attempting to help him find a job. To survive, the family lived off of donated HEB grocery cards and donated food. A number of other families had similar problems with the food stamp office, which created serious problems for the families and the agency alike. It also caused quite a bit of tension between some of the refugees and the staff at the office as the resettlement agency staff was often blamed for the slow pace of the process.

To provide one more example of the tensions created in 2009 between the resettlement agency and the refugee populations they were helping to resettle, earlier in the year, in July 2009, a large group of Burmese refugees protested early in the morning outside the RST office. They were protesting what they deemed to be generally poor living conditions. This was, of course, exacerbated by the state of the economy and the extremely limited funding to which the agency had access. The director of the office

stated that she had already spoken to the Burmese community leader who had organized the protest and she had informed him that RST was sympathetic to their concerns and was doing everything it could with the resources it had. For agency staff members that had been working with refugee resettlement for any length of time, there were no false notions about the flaws in the US refugee resettlement system. As one former employee from the employment program at one of the resettlement agencies in Austin pointed out to me in an interview, "The US refugee program is not a quality of life program." Even when the state of the government funding improved at the beginning of 2010 (described below), this statement rings with truth. The US refugee resettlement system is based largely off economic evaluations of self-sufficiency. Keles, an anthropologist working on issues of refugee resettlement in the US notes, "The neoliberal, utility maximizing, rational decision making model of personhood adopted by the resettlement regime remains largely inattentive to the experiences, cultures, and capacities of incoming refugee cohorts" (2008, 6). Despite this federal model, the government funded financial situation did improve for refugees and agencies alike at the end of 2009 and beginning of 2010.

In the middle of 2009, due to advocacy and complaints by local resettlement agencies across the nation about the (financial) state of the US refugee program, a delegation of government employees from the Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration (PRM) and the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) went on a "fact-finding" mission to numerous states to examine the state of the refugee program on the

ground level. What they found was alarming. They encountered agencies that were struggling to keep refugees in their apartments and, due to the severe economic recession at the time, to find refugees adequate jobs in a timely manner. It often took (and this was the case in Austin as well) up to 6 months to find an individual a job (see the following section for more on employment issues). The commission found that they needed to provide more substantial and sustainable funding not only for pre-arrival but also for the first few months after arrival, a crucial period in the resettlement process and for the refugees themselves and the local agencies to achieve short-term goals for their clients. The outcome of the fact-finding mission was, firstly, a doubling of the per capita income for each individual that is admitted to the US as a refugee. This meant that for a single individual, instead of receiving $450 for pre-arrival and (maybe) some post-arrival necessities, the agency would now begin receiving $900 per person[16]. With this extra money, agencies would not only be able to get all the pre-arrival services completed but have extra funds to spare for the client which could hopefully be used to lengthen the amount of time an individual's rent could be covered, grocery gift cards, etc.

The per capita increase went into effect at the beginning of 2010 and was seen as a huge success within the refugee resettlement community. The emotional effects of the

[16] This amount only includes the money that actually goes to the refugee or to set-up for the refugee. It does not include the amount that is used for administrative costs, such as staff salaries. The full amount that is allotted for each refugee in full after the per capita increase was $1,875 per person. A portion of this amount then goes to the administrative fees of each local resettlement agency.

increase was illustrated by a journal entry in late December 2009 when the staff at RST was informed of the change:

> There was a collective sigh of relief in our office today at the news of the per cap increase. There has, for the last few months, been a lot of tension between the staff and clients due to lack of jobs, high arrivals, high caseworker-client ratios, and, as always, lack of funding. Hearing the news of the increase will allow everyone some breathing room and will hopefully ease the tension in the office. It should make the clients lives a bit easier, and will definitely help the situation of numerous programs here in the office. There are still certainly many things that would make the refugee resettlement system here more effective and efficient, but this is a great beginning. (December 2009)

Upon notice of this change in the funding of the program, there was a real sense of hope and excitement that the situation would improve over the coming months.

In addition to the doubling of the per capita increase, the second aspect of the policy change also included a financial program referred to as "flex funding". The way that flex funding worked was basically that each individual refugee was allotted $1100 per person, not just the $900 per person. The $900 of the $1100 was to be used specifically for that individual, however, and if there was any left over at the end of 90 days, the remainder of that $900 could be distributed to the individual. The extra $200, however, was meant to be "flexible" for the agency. In other words, it did not *have* to be spent or given to the refugee with whom it was connected. That $200 could be used at will by the agency for emergency situations or for other clients who were deemed to be in a more dire situation. Thus the $900 was allotted to each individual and the extra $200 was kept separately by the agency in a "pot" which could then, in theory, be used for

those who needed extra. While the idea of flex funding is a good one and useful for sure, it puts the agency in potentially difficult situations in that certain families will sometimes be distributed more money than other families who feel they are just as deserving. The other major problem with flex funding is that it has to be used (or, at least, the check has to be written) within an individual/families first 90 days of arrival. This rule greatly inhibits the flexibility of the program. Most refugee families deserving of this extra funding, because of the per capita increase, do *not* need it within the first 3 months of arrival. Most families or individuals who would be deserving of this extra funding tend to face their most difficult times at 6-9 months after arrival, shortly after their other funding programs have expired and they (especially as was the case in 2009 and 2010) may still be searching for full-time employment.

One of the difficulties with these guidelines is that caseworkers have to try to identify a "needy" family or individual within the first 80 days so that the agency can then write the checks that will be used in future months. That, of course, requires quite a bit of guess work on the part of the resettlement program staff. And what if a family leaves? Or what if the working-age members of a family attain jobs and become financially self-sufficient? They may not truly need that money then but the checks will have already been written. Unfortunately, because the first 90 days after arrival are usually the most secure months for refugees financially, it can oftentimes be difficult to determine when someone may need the flex funding. As the Resettlement Program Supervisor, I was technically "in control" of the flex funds and their dispersal to the

refugees. I was therefore in close contact with the caseworkers in the resettlement program and with the staff of the employment program as to who was having medical issues, who was having trouble gaining employment, who did and did not have jobs, family emergencies, etc. Oftentimes, flex funding dispersal was dependent upon these terms. This was not the sole way in which flex funding was used at RST however. As an office we also decided we could offer some refugees more funding then we ever had previously. It was decided, for example, that we would pay 3 months of rent for all single individuals using the flex funding and thus allowing them to possibly save some money for future use with their unused per capita income. It was also decided that the agency would use the flex funds to purchase new and nicer housewares and furnishings for the apartments for the new arrivals. Previously, as stated above, many of the furnishings and household items placed in new arrivals apartments were used donated items from churches and other religious organizations. While it would have been preferred to save the flex funds for future and much more necessary emergency usage, the limitations of the program guidelines prevented the agency from doing so. This is only one of numerous examples where, because of misinformed guidelines, well-intended government sponsored refugee programs and policies become limited in their scope and ability to aid the aid the very populations they are hoping to serve.

Despite the much-needed increase, fortunately the USRP per capita income is not the only monetary benefit that refugees arriving to the US receive. Because the per capita income is largely for pre-arrival services and necessities, there are two additional funding

programs for which recently arrived refugees are eligible. The main purpose of these programs is to pay for rent, bills, and other necessary expenses such as groceries, bus passes, phones, and any additional expenses that may arise. One of these programs is called the Match Grant (MG) program, which is administered at the federal level while the other is named the Refugee Cash Assistance (RCA) program and is administered at the state level. Individuals and/or families are not eligible to receive funding from both of these programs and it was up to RST to decide which family received benefits from which program. Program policy dictates that all refugees should be explained both programs and then upon hearing the explanations and details outlining the benefits and guidelines of each, they are to choose which program suits them best. During my time at RST, this was not being done. RST, as an agency, decided that single individuals and married couples without children would be enrolled in the RCA program while families of three and four would be enrolled in match grant. The reason for this is that the programs themselves are quite complex. There are a number of rules and regulations attached to each which is very difficult to grasp upon first hearing. Additionally, very few of the documents at RST and other resettlement agencies are translated into the native language of the refugee. Of course, all the programs are translated to the refugee through an interpreter but the documents themselves rarely are. The thinking was then, to minimize confusion, make the process more streamlined, and enroll refugees in the program which was deemed to fit them and their families in the most efficient way possible, the agency decided the programs for the refugees. Each of the programs have

their positive and negative aspects of course and each will briefly be explained below to better illustrate the financial context Iraqis and other refugees were resettling during this period.

For those refugees who were enrolled in the Match Grant program, they would receive (in addition to the USRP per capita income of course) three to six months of financial assistance. The program itself starts 30 days after arrival (the first 30 days being covered by USRP funding) and after that point the program pays for a families rent for at least 3 months and up to 6 months. Match grant recipients also receive what is called "pocket money", in which twice a week they will receive a check for an amount which is determined by the number of people in the family. At RST, the pocket money amounts were $50 per adult and $10 per child. Pocket money is dispersed for a total of 12 weeks and cannot be extended beyond this time frame whereas rent paid through match grant can be extended for longer than three months. One of the things that makes the match grant program unique is that it is administered by the national agencies (i.e. CWS and EMM) and is based off a system where they allot a certain number of match grant "slots" to each local affiliate agency. Therefore, RST, for example has a limited number of match grant slots it can use each year as it may receive 50 slots from EMM and 75 from CWS in a given fiscal year. Because there is not an infinite number of slots available, the local agency has to carefully monitor how the slots are used and try not to run out of slots too early in the year. Regardless, slots often do run out before the end of

the fiscal year and in that case all of the remaining clients that arrive must be put on another program.

The final important aspect to note about the match grant program is that if the head of the household finds full-time employment and keeps that job for at least a month, then the financial assistance will, according to the guidelines of the program, continue for an additional month and then be cut off. This rule, of course, discourages refugees on match grant from finding full-time employment in the first three to four months of resettlement. Many newly arrived refugees in the US lack knowledge about American workplace norms and expectations and many are fearful about the thought of losing their government sanctioned funding at such an early phase in their resettlement experience. This aspect of the match grant program needs to be reversed and should focus on rewarding refugees who find full-time work in the first 2-3 months after arrival rather than punishing them.

The other main financial aid program available to refugees is the Refugee Cash Assistance program. RCA is an eight month program which is split into two main phases. In the first 4-month phase, the client (based off the number of individuals in the family) receives the maximum amount of money, which is divided into two payments per month. In the second phase of the program, the amount is basically divided in half and that is how much the client will receive throughout the second 4-month period. The money for the program is of course meant to be used to help a newly arrived refugee pay rent, bills, etc. There is no "pocket money" in the RCA program as there is in match

grant as that money is rolled into the bi monthly checks received by the client. And unlike the match grant program, the RCA program rewards those who find employment. Per the rules of the program, anyone who finds full-time employment for a minimum of 30 days will receive a bonus check of $150 without the worry of the program then being cut off. No matter the amount or duration of employment, through the RCA program, benefits will not be cancelled. This aspect alone makes RCA a much more desirable program.

Because the RCA program is administered and delivered by the state government, it is necessary for any refugee individuals with children who want to enroll in RCA to first apply for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Family program (TANF). Single individuals or married couples without children are not required to apply for TANF. Thus refugee couples or individuals with children must apply for TANF. The TANF benefits in Texas are not sufficient for a refugee family newly arrived in the US. Therefore (especially since the per capita increase) resettlement agencies are able to prove that their clients' assets exceed the maximum allowed to be eligible for TANF and they are thus denied TANF and are then eligible to enroll in the RCA program. Before the increase in the USRP per capita income, agencies sometimes had to scramble to make sure that refugee clients had enough assets to be denied TANF. Large families of 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9 were almost always enrolled in the RCA program through the TANF denial process in order not to take up needed match grant slots.

Short-term financial funding programs are far from the only policies and programs that affect refugees in the United States. While programs such as RCA and Match Grant are certainly necessary for a refugee's first few months in this country, it is often not sufficient, even with the per capita increase which went into affect at the end of 2009. Moreover, various guidelines attached to the different programs run counter to helping and/or motivating an individual to achieve self-sufficiency. The programs instead need last longer and the programs themselves should be equal in the way they are set up and administered, not only to make it easier for newly arrived refugees to understand, but also so all refugees are equally motivated and funded to progress and advance without the worry of losing their funding right away. The next chapter will turn to some of the other structural policies that restrict and exclude refugees from achieving their goals, participating in the broader community, and thus from successfully integrating within the larger society.

# Chapter 7: "Starting my life from zero": additional social policy restricting refugee integration

USRP per capita income, match grant, and RCA programs make up the extent of the state and federal funding available for refugees arriving in the US. With the maximum amount of time a refugee may be able to receive funding being about 8 months, there can be a lot of pressure put on individuals. For some, eight months is more than enough time to begin to adequately, if not successfully, integrate into society while for others it takes much more time. But job skills, language, health, family dynamics, past experiences, social and cultural networks, just to name a few, can all make a difference in the way and length of time it takes someone to feel secure, at home, and happy in their new environment. Through passages from numerous interviews, this chapter will look at how a number of those factors are viewed and experienced by Iraqi refugees in the Austin, TX.

## 7.1 The Importance of Time and Attention

Many of the refugees I interviewed, no matter their background, commented on how coming to the US as a refugee or SIV was like starting a completely new life. As one Iraqi put it when describing his thought process before arriving in the US, "I will be starting from below zero. Like because I have nothing here, so I will go and try to find a job and start my life from zero" (Respondent 4). Another Iraqi I interviewed stated it this way, "When you come here, you are like a newborn. You don't know the law, you don't

know how to get things, you don't know how to do all the paperwork. People need that" (Respondent 6). Another respondent when talking about expectations about living in the US as a refugee said, "I mean, you just start your life here. We know it's difficult but it's a new life" (Respondent 9). The image of being new born or starting a new life here in the US is a powerful one. Even for those that came with knowledge of the English language (as many Iraqis do) feel that they are beginning again in the US upon resettlement. Starting a new life certainly requires help, it requires support, and it requires time. The current US resettlement process is lacking in some of these aspects in a number of ways.

First, the US refugee program requires that all refugees arriving in the US receive "core services". These services are carried out mostly by the refugee's caseworker and include things such as picking up refugees at the airport, visiting them at their apartment in the first 24 hours after arrival, taking clients to the social security office to apply for social security cards, bus orientations (showing refugees how to ride and navigate the bus system), referring the client for medical screening (in Austin this is done at a clinic called the Refugee Screening Clinic), referring clients for food stamps and Medicaid (to be discussed in more detail below), enrolling them in employment services, and giving cultural orientations, just to name a few. The core services are required to be completed in the first 30 days after arrival. It is a long but necessary list of services to complete for each individual and, as stated, almost all are completed by the caseworker. At any given time, caseworkers at RST had a minimum of 75 refugee clients they were actively

working with. This kind of client to caseworker ratio does not allow for much time or space for the caseworker to do anything extra. Additionally, the maximum length of time a caseworker can "help" a refugee client is 90 days. At 90 days the caseworker must close the case. Financial programs will (usually) continue after this 90 day period, as will employment services (if needed). Regardless, 90 days is an extremely short amount of time for a newly arrived refugee to be "on their own". For many refugees, especially those that don't speak English, the local agency is one of, if not the most important resource for social capital in the community. To cut that off after such a short time is, for many, a scary experience especially when so many view arriving here as starting a new life. Here is how it was described by one Iraqi respondent:

> A lot of Iraqis are coming here with high expectations and that is the picture that is drawn to their mind. The rosy picture of America and the amazing life. I was in Jordan for several years. If I had gotten my permit to live in Jordan I wouldn't have come here to America. Why? I don't like it. This is the life I should expect? This is the apartment I should live in? Where is the help? How can I support myself? What if I don't find work? These are the worries I have in my mind all the time. How can I pass the 4 months if I don't get a job. I don't want to be out in the street and that's what many people think; after 4 to 6 months, if they don't have a job, how can you live here? It's not easy. You have to rely on yourself. (Respondent 10)

Another Iraqi respondent, who had actually worked for one of the local resettlement agencies as a caseworker for other Iraqis (a common and controversial practice around the country) also commented on the important aspect of time for Iraqis in particular and the possible outcome of not having enough time and support:

> I think the time of the resettlement; some people will have 4 months, or 6 months, or 8 months. It is very short. Lets say 60% of them will work, they

> will go and find resources. But lets say 30 or 40% of them, they will have a hard time. From this 30-40% some will leave and go back to the Middle East and some will find family or friends and go somewhere else in the US.
>
> How can those people be helped more? I know the agencies are providing job specialists to help them. But they need more attention. If somehow they can spend more time with them on employment and other things, but it depends on the agency and how many employees they have and how many refugees they have. (Respondent 16)

From yet another perspective, I want to include here an entire conversation from one of the interviews with one of the local agency employees who comments at length about the importance of time and the federal partners setting more realistic parameters:

> Apparently there was a 3-year resettlement program for the Vietnamese refugees. And according to the CWS white paper, this worked better. And I guess refugees now technically have access to 5 years of employment services and extended case management. Refugees have access to services over 5 years but do they really? We know internally that doesn't really happen. So we're looking at 90 days. It used to be 180 days; in the 70's it was 3 years. So I think there is a question of the parameters being realistic. The other thing is they are going to start measuring outcomes. I sat in on a talk the other day in AZ and they [federal partners] want refugees after case closure, after 90 days of arrival, to be able to say "yes, I know that my current income exceeds my household expenses". They want clients to make that verbal statement themselves, independently. They want clients to identify additional community resources where they can go and get their food stamps recertified if they need to. They want them to be able to state who their PCP is. Many of those outcomes will be difficult to achieve.
>
> Do you think its realistic for people to say at 90 days that their household income exceeds expenses? You have to acknowledge that refugees come here to be the working poor. I think that's the first barrier to overcome, to say point blank that you are going to be the working poor and you are going to live paycheck to paycheck and you are probably gong to come up short most months. And its clearly defined: income must exceed monthly expenses. Then you do the budget sheet with the client and they come up $20 short, I mean what are you going to do, you can't say, well, close enough. How do you have that conversation with the refugee, and then how do you have that

> conversation with your funder. We are supposed to be doing more in terms of job development and getting them living wage jobs, which is so impossible. It would be different if they made us go out and survey people a year after arrival. And yes, then, ok, our income is finally exceeding our household expenses, or we are no longer on food stamps or whatever. But why at 90 days?
>
> Do you think the number of refugees coming to the US every year is a problem [too much]? No. We have the capacity and the resources to resettle them the way they need to be resettled and address their needs. It goes back to like, its like a bunch of pieces of a puzzle that are just thrown and each city has its pieces to make the puzzle whole but you just need the time and resources to put the puzzle together. It can happen.
>
> What does it look like when the puzzle is together? Comprehensive streamlined services which should include time, investing time with clients. Time and compassion. We have talked about compassion fatigue and people [refugee staff] are exhausted and they don't have any more compassion to give.
>
> What about money, more funding? The money is out there. The private funds are out there, we just have to learn how to get them. So many times I have had clients in my office complaining to me, sometimes its about money, but more often then not its because they feel like their case manager isn't spending enough time with them. Like why didn't they take me to the park, why didn't they drive me to this appointment, why didn't I get the 6th bus orientation because that's what I need, I need 6 bus orientations. It all comes down to time and I guess time is money and its all inevitably linked to money in some way…but the money is there, its just that more amazing people and foundations need to know about us. (Respondent 12)

What these passages from the interviews all illustrate is that the process and policies for resettling refugees in the US needs more focus on giving additional and much needed time and attention to refugees that they are not receiving from the local agencies. As a public-private partnership, most agencies and communities are expected to fill this gap by using community partners. Some cities and communities are better than others at this of

course but generally, there are not a lot of additional resources for refugees to receive the time necessary to not only better understand their new homes but also to feel at home and to be truly integrated into the society.

### 7.2 LANGUAGE

A second major factor aside from financial aid that is necessary for successful integration is language acquisition. The US refugee program understands there is a need for learning English to achieve the goal of self-sufficiency and demonstrates this understanding by requiring all refugees who do not already speak English to attend classes. Again, however, the classes that are required do not give most refugees nearly enough time to actually learn the language. The importance of language is certainly not lost on the refugees themselves. One English speaking Iraqi, unprompted, described how being fluent in English helped him have a sense of self-reliance in navigating his resettlement experience when he stated, "Language plays a big role in all this. If you don't know the language in this country, you will be lost. There are some people who have been here for 16 months and they are still lost. They don't know where to go. They ask everybody. The language plays a huge role" (Respondent 6). Another English speaking respondent when asked how he thought speaking English affected his resettlement experience he answered, "Oh, too much. It's a big difference, so big. If you speak English it's a lot a lot a lot easier. I wouldn't have come here if I didn't speak English, no way" (Respondent 2).

English as a second language classes in Austin are provided for all refugees that arrive here by a single organization: Interfaith Action of Central Texas (iACT). As Austin has an increasingly high number of refugee arrivals, many of whom do not speak English, being responsible for helping all of them learn English is a challenging task to say the least. iACT faces the difficulties of instructing hundreds of individuals from different cultural, linguistic, and educational backgrounds who live in many different areas of the city and who are also trying to find employment. Despite and because of these challenges there are many Iraqis who feel that the classes are not useful for actually learning the language. One respondent, when asked what he thought could be done to make the resettlement experience better in Austin he pushed for better English language learning services, "I think they should work at the English program. First thing should be English. The current ESL classes, not good. I haven't seen anybody in the current classes in my 2 years here get benefit from the ESL classes. If I had the power I would do something to the ESL classes to make them better to do something in the refugees' life" (Respondent 2). And when asked about the ESL classes, a local agency employee stated, "its more social than about learning English. Its like the beginning of integration" (Respondent 3). This point is important as the classes do offer much needed social interaction. Refugees from similar and diverse backgrounds who might be living in different areas of the city and who have arrived at different times are given the opportunity to meet and interact in these classes.

Nonetheless, from a government standpoint of measuring outcomes, there is much to be desired in the time and intensity of instruction the refugees receive through these classes. In an interview with the director of iACT, she fully acknowledges these issues as well as the ones expressed in the interviews quoted in the previous paragraph. Here is an excerpt from the very beginning of her interview in which she succinctly lays bare the many difficulties and problems with the program:

> Yes, language is one of the most important aspects for a refugee to have a successful resettlement here. To do anything successfully here. And the way the refugee program seems to be set up is with this very wrong idea that all you have to do is go to English classes for a short period of time and your language problems are solved. And we keep saying that that's not the case because it takes at least 2 years to learn a language. And that's if you go to class and you have the time to do it. Maybe a year it would take if you have some basics. But there is no way that you can learn in 2 or 3 months. And then people are under so much pressure when they first get here with so many other things that the English is incidental the first month and then they have to find jobs and then they have no time and they are under more and more pressure. So all of this affects language learning. And the only way that I can see the program ever being a success, is if refugees are supported for at least a year. And given the time to take English classes for a year, intensive English classes. And then there is hope that they can assimilate and be successful. If not, it's all just band-aids. I mean they are just short-term solutions that we're giving them. Like when they find them the job at 3 months. That's not a solution. They're not self-sufficient; I mean who are we kidding? Its just like we are all pretending, oh, its gonna be fine. They are survivors and they are remarkable people. But if they do do well its not due to us. I mean, everyone that works with refugees are doing the best they can with what we are given. I don't believe anybody is not doing their best. But what we are given is so flawed. And the expectations are ridiculous. And I think even the refugee programs themselves sort of word things in a way to make success seem possible. For example, and I will just talk from my programs point of view but there are flaws everywhere, for ESL for refugees, all we are expected to do is offer ESL for one class session of 80 hours and with that we will have fulfilled our requirements. The contract is set by the contract with the ORR. We are only required to give that 80 hours (10 weeks) of instruction not necessarily to graduate people after they have

> spoken English. But they have to have that first contact of English. Its taken us years to accept the fact that we are just the first step, the brokers into the language and then its up to the refugees and we encourage them to go elsewhere. But we are just that first facilitator of the language. We're really not teaching them much except to take the next step hopefully. (Respondent 21)

Every city and community has a different method for offering English as a second language classes to refugees, but this quote highlights the ubiquitous need for more time and more effective policies surrounding language acquisition. Again, after the required services are completed, refugees, no matter their background, are required to use their own resources or agency to find the missing pieces of the puzzle and put them together. Sometimes, refugees are able to find support in that goal, and some others are not. As described in the story of the Iraqi family for which I was a community advocate, 5 years after arrival, still none of the members of the family speak more than a beginner to intermediate level of English.

### 7.3 CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS AND EXPECTATIONS OF LIFE IN THE US

A third issue that is important for refugee integration, especially in the first few weeks of resettlement, yet is inhibited by lack of time and sufficient resources is that of cultural orientation. In accordance with USRP guidelines, all refugees in the US must receive a cultural orientation within 30 days after arrival. The cultural orientation they receive in the US is in addition to the one that all refugees are supposed to receive overseas in the weeks before departing their country of asylum. There were numerous complaints throughout the interviews and which could be easily observed through

working at RST about the effectiveness and benefits (and sometimes truthfulness!) of the orientations both in the US and overseas. There is no doubt that the orientations *should* take place and could be very beneficial, regardless of the ambiguity of what a cultural orientation on America should entail. In their current form, however, there were a number of issues with the orientations.

Like most other services in refugee resettlement, there is a lot of variation in how cultural orientations are carried out from agency to agency. The main role of the USRP in the cultural orientations, is simply that they are conducted and completed and that they include bits of necessary information about issues like housing, bills, bank accounts, the use of 911, etc. Cultural orientations in the US are packed full of useful and necessary information for those who are newly arrived in this country. The orientations that took place overseas, however, covered (or were supposed to cover) what those who were about to move to the US could expect in terms of benefits, jobs, housing, laws, crime, etc. and how to prepare. Upon arrival in the US, though, many Iraqis noted that the reality was much different than what they heard in their overseas orientations.

Discussing first the issues and effects of the overseas orientations, many Iraqis in the interviews and throughout my 16 months working at RST expressed their discontent about their resettlement experience based upon what they had been told in the orientations overseas. Apparently, many of the orientations taking place in counties such as Syria, Jordan, and Turkey were fueling what were already sky-high expectations Iraqis held about what life in the US would be like. In most of the interviews, when asked what

they knew about life in the US, or what they expected life to be like here, most Iraqis noted that the only perceptions they had of the US before arrival were what they had seen in American movies shown on Arab television channels. Speaking specifically of the pre-arrival orientations, views of life in the US were apparently only glorified despite the state of the American economy and the realities of the US resettlement program. Generally, what became clear is that the pre-arrival orientations did not make clear the difficulties of transitioning to life in the United States. One Iraqi noted, "I had high expectations but the reality is so different, so much different then I expected."

It should be noted here that SIV's and generally any Iraqis travelling straight from Iraq to the US, did not receive a cultural orientation before departure. Thus many of the SIV's I spoke with in interviews discussed how they would talk extensively to American soldiers that they knew in the Green Zone to quiz them about life in America. One Iraqi SIV, for example, who had left from Baghdad but had to stay in transit in Turkey for about 2 months where there was already a substantial population of Iraqi refugees, said:

> To be honest with you, I might have a different idea, but a lot of people [Iraqi refugees] I heard, in Turkey, I spend 45-50 days there. I had to listen to them. I had to hear their stories and they were expecting to come here and have everything set up and have everything provided for them and jobs provided for them…which is crazy. You can't think that way. If you want to move somewhere to start a new life, you gotta work harder, and think harder, think further because you are going to be starting from nothing even if you have enough money with you to survive for like a year or something. They were thinking that way …who? The Iraqis, so I was telling a lot of them from experience and from what I was hearing from the soldiers, I was like hey guys, its not like this. Trust me, I mean, I've never been there so call me crazy but, the life in there is really…I mean you gotta be serious to survive in there. They were like, no, everything is gonna be just fine, life is easy. I said no, its not easy. First you go there and you gotta be smart. You got to be able

> to in a short time find a job, find a safe place to put your family, don't worry about if you are going to see Iraqis around, it doesn't matter, because everybody is going to be busy in his life, the only thing you need to focus on is your work and your family and how to cover your rent. They were all like nah nah, you are wrong and I was like, I am telling you. I'm not trying to show myself like I was smart or something, but I was just trying to learn from people around me and learn from their experiences. So 6 months before I got here, I was always asking question to my friends, the soldiers, how do you do this, what about work, what about kids and families, day care, so I was asking a lot of questions to feed my brain. I didn't want to be surprised and that's why when I got here I wasn't surprised… I know what the life is here. I know a lot of them [Iraqis] are expecting one thing but the reality is something else. But I heard that a lot of them went back to the country [to Iraq], but I don't blame nobody. They have to blame themselves because they had the wrong picture before they came here. (Respondent 4)

This passage illustrates how this specific Iraqi who came through the SIV program used Americans that he knew in the military to go through what could be thought of as an informal cultural orientation. The point he makes here when referring to the other Iraqis, however, is extremely important to remember as it is these Iraqis (those who are not SIV's) who make up the majority of those that have come to the US as refugees. And for various reasons, as he points out, many of these Iraqis did not have an accurate view of what life in the US would be like. And for various other reasons, which are not clear, the Iraqi refugees he refers to in this story refused to believe him even when he shared with them what he had heard from his American friends about the difficulties of life in the US. Sometimes people believe only what they choose to believe.

In this quote the respondent also discusses the idea of Iraqis coming to the US and then choosing to go "back to the country", back to Iraq. This did happen with a small number of Iraqis in Austin and there are other documented stories from around the

country where Iraqis have chosen to return because they cannot or simply do not want to deal with the difficult transition here. For some, it is too much to bear. Some choose to leave because of lack of work, some because of language, and others simply because of what they perceived to be stark differences in the culture and structure of society. Another of the Iraqi SIV's that I interviewed told a story of a friend that he had who was also an SIV, who spoke English, but still decided to return to Iraq with his family.

> I had a friend, he used to live in Michigan, he lived there because he couldn't find a job and he realized that if he stayed in the states, he will have to live his life without seeing his family because he is going to work late and the problem is, his wife didn't adjust. I was patient with my wife. Taught her how to drive, things like that. He wouldn't do it. He kept his wife in the apartment and even the kids, he will drive them to school and bring them back from school and this is why he lost his job because he couldn't leave at 3 o'clock. But he would leave to bring his kids anyway and this is why he got fired. So he worked only weekends so he had the time to take them back and forth to school and he couldn't make enough money to live so he decided to go back to Iraq. It was tough. But he was a good guy, I worked with him at the embassy. But each family has its own difficulties, its own story. (Respondent 16)

In this quote, the friend of the respondent had trouble balancing his own religious and cultural norms with the structure and culture of the receiving society. Unable to find the proper balance, he decided to return to Iraq. This is a good example of how cultural and societal differences need to be accounted for through policy and more generally by the receiving society. The man being described in this passage obviously felt restrained and possibly even paralyzed in the US due to his own deep-seated cultural values and his direct or indirect ideological strictures.

Another example of an Iraqi that decided to return to Iraq is one that comes from my experience of working at the resettlement agency. When I first started working at RST as an employment specialist, one of the first Iraqi refugees that I worked with was a young man from the western slums of Baghdad. He had had a head injury at a young age that had impaired his mental health to an extent and thus he had neither education nor any work experience. He spoke no English and the location of his family was unknown. He arrived to the US at the same time as two or three other single Iraqis so he had roommates who he could communicate with and ostensibly get support from. Unfortunately, he and his roommates fought often, to the point when they had fulfilled the lease for the apartment they were sharing, he was left on his own as they decided to find separate living arrangements. I was tasked with trying to help this young Iraqi find employment here. I helped him apply for numerous jobs of all kinds but no one would hire him. After being in the US for about 6 months, with financial help from one of the local mosques, he returned to Iraq. This individual did not believe that relocating to a different city or state would help his situation in the US and thus he decided the only way he could continue to survive was if he returned to the Middle East.

This story and the one told in the excerpt from the interview above about the Iraqi SIV in Michigan who decided to return are not the only ones of its kind. In 2008 and 2009 as more and more Iraqis began to arrive in the US during the recession and into a resettlement system that was vastly underfunded, many Iraqis, especially those who had come from middle class and educated backgrounds were feeling disillusioned and

hopeless about what their future would be like in the US. Figure 5.1 is a screen shot from an article from the Salt Lake Tribune from March 11, 2009. The article, entitled "Iraqi refugees returning to danger zone to escape poverty in Utah", tells of an Iraqi lawyer who was resettled with his large family in Utah and after six months felt, "betrayed by the United Nations' promises and the scant help offered by the American resettlement system." One of the Iraqis interviewed for the article, who was slated to return to Syria, states, "We feel like we're human beings there. We feel like here we are mice."

Whether it is the lack of cultural awareness here, major cultural and societal differences, the economy, insufficient resettlement benefits, or a combination of these, many refugees and Iraqis in particular can find it extremely difficult to transition to life in the US. One of the disadvantages of being a male researcher and conducting interviews with Arab and Islamic populations is that it is difficult and often considered culturally inappropriate to interview women. Only having done two interviews with female respondents, much of my knowledge about the resettlement experience for Iraqi women came through participant observation at the resettlement agency or if male respondents discussed their wives or other female family members' experiences in the US. The Iraqi SIV who had previously worked as a resettlement specialist at one of the local agencies in Austin offered a fairly detailed view of his wife's experience in the US. Her

Figure 7.1 Article from Salt Lake Tribune on refugees returning to Iraq

The Salt Lake Tribune

WEDNESDAY, March 11, 2009

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**Iraqi refugees returning to danger zone to escape poverty in Utah**

Frustration » "We're human beings there. ... Here we are mice."

By Julia Lyon
The Salt Lake Tribune

Updated: 03/01/2009 06:07:17 AM MST

Murray » Six months ago, Tarek Darwish and his family arrived in Utah as refugees craving a new and better life. Last week, his family wept and kissed his hand in farewell as the former lawyer, disillusioned, left to return to Iraq.

Life in Utah has been a list of disappointments. His family of seven lives in a two-bedroom apartment. None of the adults have jobs. His wife needs glasses and dental work but has been told Utah's Medicaid won't cover them.

He feels betrayed by the United Nations' promises and the scant help offered by the American resettlement system. He hopes his family will follow when school is out.

"If you have a drop of brain, don't leave Iraq," he said through an interpreter.

Click photo to enlarge

The Murray family of Iraqi refugee Tarek Darwish said... (Leah Hogsten/The Salt Lake Tribune)

1 2 3 »

Tarek Darwish kisses his wife Nahida Mahmoud goodbye outside the family's apartment. For for Iraqi attorney Tarek Darwish, his wife Nahida Mahmoud and their 5 children, the hope of

After the truck taking him to the airport drove away, his wife of 38 years released a small cry.

As human rights organizations call for aid and resettlement for millions of Iraqi refugees, some who are exasperated by America's refugee system are going home or attempting to return to other countries in the Middle East. They feel abandoned by federal policies that offer limited and brief financial support and leave many refugees living in poverty.

Refugees planning to leave acknowledge they may be less safe in Iraq, but believe they will be better able to afford food, pay rent and receive medical care.

Educated Iraqis eager to re-establish their middle-class



*Source: http://www.sltrib.com/news/ci_11808992*

experience, it seems, has been in stark contrast to his own. He states:

> My wife is learning the language. Her experience has been more difficult. The language was a big barrier for her. And the culture thing. She comes from a very protective family. She doesn't mix easily with the people here. She wears a scarf. When she sees a Muslim without a scarf, she says I don't want to. So she doesn't have this accepting thing but she is just now changing, because it is a different culture, you will do whatever you want to do and you don't judge here. She is very protective for our daughters because she doesn't want people from overseas to say you lost the culture. But now she is doing OK, after she got the drivers license and the car, she felt like now she has the right to do almost anything. The first year she just sat at home doing nothing. I tried to take her to ESL classes but our son was very

> young. Now he is a little bit older and my daughters can take care of him maybe if we left the house for an hour or two and now she has a car she can go to ESL classes so she goes to a school here now every day and she is learning, she has a friend, and my sister in laws are her friends so she is doing better than the first year. (Respondent 16)

Many Iraqis admitted to having unrealistic expectations however. And while they were surprised at the challenges in transitioning to life after arrival in the US, most adjust to the changes without discussing the desire to move back to Iraq or other countries in the Middle East. Concerning these expectations, another Iraqi respondent said, "The reality in the US is the opposite of what I was thinking. I thought I would come here and find a job so easy. That I would come here and have fun and work, not care about money because I will make a lot of money, build my future and buy a house, down payment, I will buy a car and live alone and all this stuff. But when I came here I found it was too hard to do all this stuff" (Respondent 9). Here is how yet another Iraqi described her experience in terms of the differences from what she was told in the overseas orientations and what she found life to be like once in the US:

> Yes, they gave us an orientation. They told us when we first got to the US; we would get a job and work right away. But the reality was kind of different then the way they were explaining it to us in the classes. We weren't expecting to face such big challenges when we first got here to the US. They were saying that when we get to the US, we will get a job, and we will work, and we will live our life just like anybody else. The reality was though, that there were a lot of challenges especially when we got to the point where we were going to find a job.
>
> We were assigned to RST and started receiving the government benefits. And then we started facing the challenges. The rent was more expensive then we were expecting it. With the jobs, we had to start going to churches and mosques asking for support to survive. We were between here and there, just

> to keep going through our days and live from day to day. People in the US are merciful though and helped us a lot. A lot of people helped us. We are getting there, we are in the process. My son is disappointed though. He has kind of given up because he cannot find a job because it is so hard to find a job. Same with my daughter but I am trying to accommodate them and I explain to them, you remember how we were living back in Iraq and what we were dealing with. Its not always going to be like this, you have to be patient because it will take some time. But I feel like all the responsibility is on me.
>
> With the language barrier, it has been difficult. We are just trying to keep learning. We try to learn from the books, we try to learn from talking with people. When we first got here, we couldn't communicate with anybody. But things change. Things are getting a little bit better, my other son is in second grade and he is communicating and I can communicate a little better with people from when I first arrived. But we were definitely feeling pressure. With language and work. Thought we would find a job easy but it wasn't like that. We are just trying to catch up with life, and to live our life. (Respondent 23)

This quote comes from an interview with a Palestinian Iraqi woman who lived for three years in United Nations refugee camp along the border with Syria. As one can see from this passage, this individual and her family were largely unprepared for life in the US. While it is difficult to determine how much a cultural orientation overseas could have prepared them for life in this country, had the situation been explained to them more clearly, it might have made life here in the first few months more bearable. Here is yet another example of an Iraqi refugee that was in Syria for 3 years.

> We had orientation before coming to the US. It was 3 days long. Man, they made it like the greatest country in the world. They said you will get a job like this (snaps fingers), you will get a benefit for a long time, you will get everything, you will get your own apartment, you will get your own things, you will get assisted for a year. Really, ask any of the Iraqis that came through Syria, or Jordan, or Turkey. At least at that time, that is what they said, I don't know if they changed the process. But at that time, man, they will offer 1 2 3 4 5 6 7, everything. The people giving the orientation were

> Syrian, but they work with the UN. And they had been in America here before to do the training and now they are back in Syria to do the orientation. So when I came here I was shocked. (Respondent 20)

Certainly orientations, whether in the US or overseas, are not the sole answer to a smoother transition and integration experience for all Iraqis (and refugees in general) who struggle in the first months and even years in the US. But it is part of the answer. Quoting again from the Iraqi SIV who worked and volunteered with the resettlement agency here in Austin:

> First, when I worked with the local agency here, I wanted to do something about cultural orientations. The ones overseas we couldn't do anything about. If we could do something about that we wouldn't have all the shocked families here. We would have families who say, "we don't want to go" [to America]. This is why we have a lot of families who are shocked. And some families will have the shock time longer than other families. It depends on how you will accept the change and the change is not about changing the religion or the culture, its just realizing how the new life is working, how people are thinking. So many things are different here. This is why Caritas and RST have a hard time with Iraqis, because Iraqis have high expectations. The minute I walked a family into an apartment [for the first time] they say, where is the TV, where is the satellite. (Respondent laughing) What satellite? They say, they told us back in Jordan they are going to find us anything. I have families that argued with me and wrote a complaint against me because I didn't go to the airplane door to pick them up. I can't, I'm not allowed. They said that someone told them there [in Jordan], that someone will pick you up from the door and they will give you a house. Just recently as a volunteer I settled a lady and she said where is my house? I said, ok, you have an apartment, she said no, she said the minute I applied as a refugee, they started to build my house. I said that's not true. I spent 2 hours at the apartment talking to her and she said, no, I will not live with a roommate. I said, OK, just spend the night and tomorrow a case manager will come to you. I am a volunteer. I cannot do anything. So you need to talk a lot and just explain to them and some of them will not accept it. But usually they will adjust. I realized, I learned from my experience, they will adjust. They will stay, I think only 4 or 5 families [in Austin] have left the country. But almost all of them will say they are going to leave but they will stay. I know

> 3 families that went back to Iraq and it was very difficult for them. Life was too hard to adjust to. (Respondent 16)

This Iraqis assessment that more direct overseas cultural orientations would result in a less "shocking" experience for Iraqi refugees echoes other refugees' comments that more straightforward and candid orientations post-arrival would have positive long term effects as well. More importantly, this Iraqi respondent is sharing some experiences he had with other newly arrived Iraqi refugees. He paints a picture of numerous misinformed and disillusioned refugees but also illustrates that adjustment is challenging, to say the least, not just for the Iraqis, *but also for the resettlement agency staff who are unprepared and unknowledgeable about Arab and Iraqi culture*. "So many things are different here. This is why Caritas and RST have a hard time with Iraqis…" Surely things are different here for other arriving refugee groups as well. So why do resettlement agencies, as this respondent notes, have a disproportionately hard time working with Iraqis? He blames this partially on the "high expectations" of Iraqis. But he also lays partial blame on the difficult cultural transition from Iraqi Arab culture to "how the new life is working" and "how people are thinking" here. Understanding these transitions are not easy and guidance is necessary. Cultural orientations, whether overseas or in the US, are inadequate for guiding many Iraqi refugees through the difficult navigation of "new life" in the US.

The post-arrival orientations conducted at all resettlement agencies, as noted above, vary in structure from agency to agency. They are required, however, to cover a

number of important topics and issues for newly arrived refugees such as detailed financial benefit explanations, budgeting, health and wellness issues, information about long-term case management and immigration and citizenship documentation. It is a lot of information and it is difficult to retain it all at once. Additionally, as many refugees do not speak English, the information must be received through an interpreter, which can make the process take much longer and can make it more difficult to understand. In one interview with an Iraqi refugee who spoke English, when asked what could be done in his opinion to improve post-arrival services, he immediately mentioned orientations.

> They need to improve orientations. They didn't know how to deal with Iraqis. They put us in another case because they said you guys speak English. They said you guys know what to do. I said yes, we know English but we don't know what to do. So our reference was our [Iraqi] friend who got here one week before us. We need better cultural orientation. Most refugees know nothing of American culture…the uneducated people, they know nothing, especially the old people. They need more orientation culturally. What they have to do, what they should do, what they shouldn't do, what they can do, what they can't do. Not to push them to find a job. Help them understand this first and then they will have experience to find another job. (Respondent 9)

Another English speaking Iraqi refugee brought up orientations and the role the case managers should play in better preparing the new refugees for life in the US.

> I think they are doing better now because the [USRP] money has increased and they are using the money well, trying to make this money last for a long time. So I think the current program is the best so far. However, they [the local resettlement agencies] need to train the caseworker to be more professional. The caseworkers are not enough trained. How so? In how to deal with the refugees. Not culturally, but how to make the refugees realize the difficulties here. Orientations are not working well. I would prefer more one on one conversation. At orientation they are giving 90% of the information and the refugees are keeping only 5-10% of all of this

> information. Like my orientation, I couldn't take all the information. Even though I could speak English, I'm like no way. So the one on one conversation will be a lot better. Yes, the caseworkers should better prepare the refugees for the difficulties they are going to face. People expect everything [here in the US] will be smooth and its not. (Respondent 2)

Through all of these examples, it becomes clear that the current method for structuring and providing cultural orientations to refugees both overseas and in the US is lacking. As all of these excerpts illustrate, a more candid and blunt delivery of the way of life here in the US is needed. This point seems to stand out especially for the Iraqi refugees because of the specific historical, cultural, and political contexts from which they are entering the US. While integration for refugees is difficult no matter the background or country of origin, Iraqi refugees, while coming from a situation of extreme violence, are also coming from largely middle class backgrounds. Many of the Iraqis that arrived and are continuing to arrive here are educated, English speaking, and have vast professional and technical job experience. Even those who do not come from middle or upper class backgrounds, come from a society where there were vast governmental programs subsidizing food, water, shelter and other basic needs. According to a 2004 UNESCO report on the state of Iraqi education, "prior to the period of the Gulf War and subsequent economic sanctions, the country had one of the best performing education systems in the region" (UNESCO 2004, iii). When comparing Iraqis as a refugee group arriving to the US then to other refugee groups coming from much different historical and political contexts, one can begin to get a sense of why expectations of Iraqis seem to be much higher than those of some of the other refugee populations resettling in this country. It is

not just the higher expectations that make the transition challenging for Iraqis here however. It is also, of course, cultural difference. As seen from some of the passages above and will be seen in more detail below, deep-seated cultural values and ideological strictures, regardless of religion and religious views plays an important part in making the transition here. In many respects, the challenge of integration and of transition to life here for Iraqis goes much further than language and financial benefits. It has to do with the presence of true guidance and help. Without this, the current resettlement paradigm runs the risk of turning a general sense of disillusionment into real depression and anxiety, or worse, forcing some Iraqis to return to the heart of the very conflict they tried so hard to escape.

The policy structure of the US resettlement program, English language initiatives and cultural orientations are not the only issues facing Iraqis for successfully integrating into American society however. Employment was also a major factor in the resettlement experience of Iraqis during this period, as it was for all refugees coming to the US of course. Iraqis' experience with finding employment in the US was somewhat unique however largely because of some of the contextual differences laid out above. The next section then will deal with the issue of employment for Iraqi refugees in the US in 2009 and 2010.

# Chapter 8: "Settling into a life of poverty": Iraqi refugee resettlement and employment in the US

It is impossible to have a discussion about refugee employment in the United States in 2009 and 2010 without mentioning the state of the economy in this country at that time. Even though there was quite a bit of secondary migration of Iraqi (and other refugee groups) refugees from other states to Texas because of perceptions of a stronger economy in this state, jobs were scarce, especially for newly arrived refugees. As an employment specialist for Middle Eastern populations at RST and then as manager for the entire employment program, I was experiencing daily the difficulties of finding jobs for refugees in Austin, TX.

This chapter will thus first look at the important issue of employment as it relates to newly arrived Iraqi refugees in 2009 and 2010. Through data from interviews with both refugees and with agency staff, it covers aspects of the economic recession into which the refugees were resettling and the types of jobs that were typically offered to refugees and the initial reactions of Iraqis to those positions. This section of the chapter illustrates some the cultural barriers which prevented almost all Iraqis from, at least at first, accepting entry level positions which are often offered to refugees. After discussing employment opportunities (or lack thereof) the chapter turns briefly to issues of agency. While much of the last two chapters have discussed structural barriers and hurdles to successful integration in the US, agency is, of course, an extremely important aspect of

how integration happens. The second section of this chapter will thus look at how Iraqis use their own agency and initiative to "catch up with life" here in the US.

### 8.1 (Lack of) A Future in the US: Employment variables for Iraqi refugees

No matter the state of the economy and no matter what refugee group one is working with, there are, unfortunately, only a handful of types of jobs that refugees will be accepted for. Unfortunately, most of these jobs are entry level and low-paying hourly positions. Depending on the city, refugees are often employed in whatever industry is prevalent in that place. In some cities, for example, plants, factories, or agricultural positions abound and oftentimes these industries offer plentiful opportunities for newly arrived refugees who do not speak English. In Austin, these types of industries are much more scarce. The main employers of refugees in the Austin area are hotels and warehouses, with other types of businesses filling in the gaps such as grocery and convenience stores, restaurants, hospitals, etc. During 2009 and 2010, refugees (with or without knowledge of the English language) applying for positions in these industries were encountering increasingly high competition in an environment of decreasing job availability. This only made the task of securing employment more challenging.

In 2009, before the USRP per capita increase, and when the economy in the US seemed to be at a low, there was a lot of pressure on refugees and employment program staff alike. As there was not sufficient emergency funding past the allotted benefits period, it made employment an imperative, not just as an aspect of "successful" integration, but simply for surviving. Ironically enough, the types of jobs that are often

secured for refugees new to the US (i.e. entry level, low wage, hourly) are commonly referred to in the resettlement field as "survival jobs". For many Iraqis, these types of jobs presented a problem.

For most Iraqis coming to the US, even before realizing the state of the economy at that time, employment was at the forefront of how they viewed their own futures here. Indeed, it turned out that for some, it was one of the reasons they hoped to leave Iraq even before the American-led invasion in 2003. In one interview, when I asked an Iraqi respondent when it was that he decided he wanted to leave Iraq, it was not when he found his and his family's life in danger. Instead he stated:

> I decided I wanted to leave in the 90's, like, when I was in college. I couldn't see any future for me in Iraq. Most of my friends' older brothers during that time [the Gulf War] left for Europe, US, they even went to Mexico. That was a way for them to cross the border illegally for them to come to the United States. After that time, you would go to someone's house, see a picture of someone that you knew that you played cards with or played dominos with and think, he is doing well with a good job in like, Denmark or somewhere. I'm not being like him. Why has he found a way to leave Iraq while I am stuck in this ditch in Iraq without future? I couldn't leave at that time though because I wasn't 18 yet. But I found the opportunity with the American war in Iraq. (Respondent 6)

The Iraqi who was speaking in this interview received a college degree in Baghdad in computer science so he was highly educated and had vast technical expertise. Moreover, while he did not sense a "future" for himself in Iraq, he hoped for that future in the US. The employment situation he encountered in the US, however, was much different than he expected, not only because of the state of the economy when he arrived but also

because of the types of jobs that were available to him. Later in the interview when discussing employment and his experience in the US he stated:

> Employment was a challenge, yes, but the economy was in recession. People *born here* [emphasis original] were fighting for jobs, so how about us [refugees]? It was not easy. I went six months without a job. I worked as a delivery driver for a while. The way it worked was, they call you, you go to the restaurant and pick up the food and then take the food to the customer. The whole thing, you get like $4 for. I worked for them for like five days and then I quit. You had to get your own gas, maintenance for your car. Then I went to [the RST employment program] and they wrote me a good recommendation. I couldn't find a job with my degree here because it is almost worth nothing here. And then I said, lets think about it, Austin is a computer city and a hotel city. I couldn't find anything with the computers so let's look at the hotels part. It took me like a week to find this job. Except being a housekeeper or something, I would do anything. I love the valet job. I love cars, so why not? Within three days after applying, I got an interview and I got the job. (Respondent 6)

There are a number of points from this quote that are important to address. As he states in the passage, this man went six months without a job. During this time period, this was not uncommon. It could easily take months to find a job. It is also worthy to make note, however, of when he states, "except being a housekeeper or something, I would do anything." There were certain jobs, it seemed, that almost all Iraqis refused to accept. These included positions such as housekeeping in hotels, being a waiter at a restaurant, washing dishes, etc. While the man speaking here was, at the time of the interview, working as a valet driver at a hotel he was decidedly optimistic and upbeat about the position. According to his interview, one factor for his upbeat attitude was due to the fact that he was simply happy to have a job while another factor had to do with the

friendships he had formed with his co-workers, an important aspect of the employment process and for sure, the process of true integration.

Many educated Iraqis had similar experiences of arriving in the US and being forced into jobs which were far below their education level. Not all Iraqis, however, were upbeat about their employment situation. Another Iraqi refugee who spoke English well and had a college degree in chemistry found himself in a similar situation. He had gone four months without a job as he was searching diligently for a chemistry-related position. In the following quote he describes his sense of frustration at the employment situation here.

> When RST started looking for jobs for me, I went every week. But at that time, I just wanted a job as a chemist. I have my experience as a chemist. Why could I not find a job as a chemist? I know its America but nobody told me about the economy and I don't want to believe this. This is an old story, they talk about it because I don't think they know someone with a background in chemistry and who has experience like I have. So I need to work as a chemist. I don't want to work in a restaurant, or a warehouse, I don't want this! I just want to work as a chemist. So in the [employment] class here [at RST], Amanda [RST employee] just worked with the entry level. I don't want to work in entry level and therefore I went to MRC [Multi-cultural Refugee Coalition] and they will help me find a job as a chemist with high level. And at MRC, the guy told me that at RST they just want to find you a job, just to start and then you can help yourself. But at the first, you just need a job. I said I need a job as a chemist. By March, my government assistance almost ended. 4 months. Before that, Amanda came to me asking me, I should work either in the hospital or warehouse. I hated that idea. I wanted to work as a chemist. But in the end I didn't have any choice. So I went to Amanda and I said find me any job. I need a job. She said OK, I will submit your resume to someone. She submitted it to a warehouse and the warehouse called me and I started at the end of March. Amanda found that job for me. Why do I need to work at an entry level with people that have a low level of education? Why do I need to deal with them? But I just get used to it because I need the money.

> I continue to look for a job as a chemist. I never stopped. Every week I apply for something. Any time I find any chemist position I submit my resume to that position. I don't know what's wrong. Maybe its because I don't have my green card. Maybe they don't want to hire an Arabic person named Mohammed for a chemist position. Maybe they think he is a terrorist. No one calls back, no one says hi, nothing. Even the staffing agency, I work with them to find a chemist job. I make interview with them, they took all my papers, nothing happened. And one of the staffing agencies called Key center, I think they are lying to me, because every time I call she says, there is no job, there is nothing. Since February till now, she has never told me there is a position. I call her back each week and she says there is nothing in chemistry.
>
> A lot of people are complaining about the job situation here. I don't know why they [RST] are just looking in hotels and restaurants, they need to find better jobs. Someone who came from Iraq with a good job and education and they are offered a job at a restaurant or hotel? Of course they will not accept it. And we are not Bhutanese or African, with all my respect to them, they don't have a job back home and they come here and they will accept anything. So we cannot accept these kinds of jobs. That's what a lot of Iraqis say. (Respondent 20)

Because of the US resettlement program's aggressive focus on employment as the primary measure of self-sufficiency, refugees are required to accept the first job that is offered to them. With Iraqis, this was a constant source of tension. It often took many Iraqis months to accept the jobs that the employment programs at resettlement agencies were offering them, and even then, there were some jobs (such as housekeeping) that many Iraqis refused to accept no matter what. In another interview, an Iraqi man stated:

> The problem with the Iraqis is that 80% of them will not accept doing what the other refugees are doing. This is a problem; they will think that is a permanent thing. So it is difficult. And I faced it, when I first came they said, can you work at a warehouse? At first I said no. And then my brother talked to me and said, its not permanent, its just work, you provide for your family and then you will find something else. And then I said OK, I will accept it and then they didn't accept me because they said I am overqualified.

> They didn't even interview me and I learned that is something that happens a lot. But the problem with the employment programs is that they will only have one or two positions again and again which is in the housing [housekeeping] business. And I know it's very difficult to find a job for people that doesn't have employment history here. But then the refugees will say, "no I've been here 4 months, I couldn't find a job, no one is helping me find a good job." But they don't understand from a good job and a job that's a start…the minute you will start, you will start your employment history and then you can go from there. (Respondent 16)

Many Iraqi refugees are worried, however, that they will not be able to "go from there". They are worried that without an American education or degree that they will be stuck in survival jobs and will thus not have the ability to realize the "future" that they envisioned for themselves in the US. As the Iraqi refugee with the chemistry degree put it:

> I need to think about getting another job because the income [at his current job] is not good. I have a friend from Senegal here and he said in this country if you don't have a degree, you will always be working at a restaurant, hotel, warehouse, hospital, and your income will be for your life. You work here for 2 years, laid off, start again, work there for 2 years, laid off, and again and again. This is not work. He discovered that after being here 5 or 6 years. And now he is student at ACC [Austin Community College]. You need to have a degree. Then you will have better job, better income, better life. People tell me my degree from Iraq will not work. (Respondent 20)

For this Iraqi, his future and successful integration will not truly be realized until he is able to get his degree and acquire the job he wants. While he is considered self-sufficient by governmental standards and USRP program measurements, his own goals and desires have not been met. What this imbalance highlights is the stark contrast between the way the US government measures "successful" integration and the way each individual defines their own terms of success.

There seems to be some agreement, not just from the Iraqis interviewed for this study, but also among Americans working in the resettlement field that under the current resettlement paradigm many refugees (educated or not) enter into a difficult cycle of poverty after arrival here. As a staff member for one of the Austin resettlement agencies noted, "You have to acknowledge that refugees come here to be the working poor. I think that's the first barrier to overcome, to say point blank that you are going to be the working poor and you are going to live paycheck to paycheck and you are probably going to come up short most months." Clearly, from the excerpt from the Iraqi chemist above, this is unacceptable to many Iraqis, especially those that have bachelors, masters, and doctoral degrees. In another interview with the co-founder of a community organization helping refugees with long-term goals and support, she stated:

> So many people [refugees] get so negative about the [local] agencies and they are saying you know, they're not doing this or they're not doing that. I say, well, they are federally funded and that's sort of the only way to do this work at this scale so its not the agencies fault, its our federal governments faul-- …well, not fault, I mean we [the US] are certainly settling so many people and that's great that they are finding refuge, but are we settling people into a life of poverty, because of the way that we have set up the whole system? So I tell people, don't get angry at Caritas or RST for doing the job that they do with the limited and restricted resources that they have. (Respondent 14)

This quote illustrates that while there is a sense that there is a humanitarian aspect to the US refugee program in that it provides refuge to people from all over the world every year, the current resettlement system in the US then subscribes these individuals to a potential life of poverty, to being and/or becoming the "working poor". Arguing against this point, federal government partners often point to the successes of some refugees in

starting businesses, getting a college education, or even playing a role in starting important local ethnic community organizations and thus participating in important aspects of civil society here. Actually, the federal government defends this model on the Department of State website in which they explain the reception and placement program:

> Refugees receive employment authorization and are encouraged to become employed as soon as possible. Based on years of experience, the U.S. refugee resettlement program has found that people learn English and begin to function comfortably much faster if they start work soon after arrival. Most refugees begin in entry-level jobs, even if they have high-level skills or education. With time, many if not most refugees move ahead professionally and find both success and satisfaction in the United States.[17]

While these cases do exist and they are remarkable examples, they are also exceptional, in that they are not the norm. This passage also stands out for what is *not* in it as much as what is included. As one can see, there is no mention of integration whatsoever. Integration is actually not mentioned in any part of the description on the webpage. In an interview with a local agency employee, she gives an opposing viewpoint:

> We definitely need a ton more funding for vocational training and employment programs. Like really start training people. I hate going to a hotel and seeing a client that I placed there 2 years ago still in that job. I hate that. They're not climbing the ladder, they haven't changed, their English hasn't gotten better and I promised them that it would. It's like saying, take this job, its temporary, its gonna help your English. Well, so and so I saw the other day, still doesn't speak English better then he did a year and a half ago, he's still in the basement of a laundry room folding towels all day long and he got a 15 cent raise this year. It breaks my heart because I told him it was gonna be different. Refugees aren't remarkable people, they are regular people, working regular jobs. (Respondent 12)

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[17] http://www.state.gov/j/prm/ra/receptionplacement/index.htm

This quote exemplifies and counters the neo-liberal, individualistic model that the American resettlement system is based upon. For people to "succeed", to reach their goals and dreams, it requires "regular" people to be remarkable. This can be quite difficult for a refugee entering into the current structure of the US refugee resettlement program. Can integration take place within this current model? As Castles et al ask in their comprehensive report on integration for the British government, "can one speak of immigrant or refugee incorporation into an excluded underclass with little public voice and few chances of socio-economic mobility, as integration?" (Castles et al. 2001). While there needs to be much more, there are some additional resources and organizations that are available to refugees in some places, other than local resettlement agencies, that offer services and support for refugees to succeed and to meet their own expectations. The following example is one such organization in Austin.

In the first quote from the Iraqi that hopes to one day be a chemist, he refers to the organization, the MRC. This organization is the Multi-cultural Refugee Coalition and is not a resettlement agency but instead was created, as their website states, for "empowering refugees settled to Austin towards self-sufficiency through education, community, and reconciliation"[18]. The MRC hopes to offer much-needed long-term support (not financial support though) for refugees that cannot be provided by the resettlement agencies. It is one of the few examples in Austin of integration happening as a two way process. I was able to interview one of the co-founders of the MRC in 2011.

[18] http://mrcaustin.org/

In her interview, she notes the difficulty of defining and even understanding the concepts of integration and self-sufficiency, as they are, in her view, determined by the experience and expectations of each individual refugee. She stated in her interview that she became interested in refugee issues after volunteering as a community advocate with the local agency, Caritas. During her time as a community advocate she worked with a newly arrived Burundian family, aiding them in their resettlement process. She is still in contact with this family and uses them as an example when giving her assessment of how the idea of self-sufficiency means very different things to different people.

> I mean self-sufficiency looks so different to so many different people and a lot of it depends on what your expectations are. Like for her [Burundian refugee] family, once they were able to get into public housing and get that set and the parents are elders, and they're not really working, and they have their space, and they go to MRC on Saturdays and they go to ESL downtown and they are in East Austin so they are close to our garden and that is something they do all the time. And so they're happy, they like where they are. They will probably be there the rest of their lives. So, you know, they're doing alright. So, for them, their life is probably quite self-sufficient. Whereas expectations of somebody else that is trying to be truly self-sufficient may be a lot different. Like I see with a lot of the Iraqi families, they are trying to get up to that standard of where they were before. And, I mean, their self-sufficiency might take years and years and years to reach. So it's interesting because self-sufficiency is so different for so many people. I think self-sufficiency definitely comes down to expectations. So, what are your expectations for living here? I think definitely that expectations come into play very much because like I said, that family [the Burundian refugee family] I was talking about probably feels pretty self-sufficient. They may never have more money than they have now, they are probably never going to move into a house, probably never going to have all these other things, but she gets around and she's got it, and I feel quite confident that they are ok. Whereas others, maybe their expectations are up here. (Respondent 14)

The comments here on achieving self-sufficiency are interesting. She (and through her, the MRC) has much different ideas than the government about how measuring an individual's self-sufficiency should look. Her measurements are based on an individual's expectations, on their hopes and dreams while government standards are based almost solely on employment and financial outcomes. Both are important of course, but to have happy, functioning, committed, and active members (and eventually citizens) of a community and of a country, the services and support that MRC offers are as important for refugee integration and resettlement as are the functions of the local (largely government-funded) resettlement agencies. Unfortunately, as she notes in her interview, gaining sufficient funding for the MRC is a constant challenge. There should be no question, however, that funding should be provided for organizations like the MRC whether at the city, state, and/or federal level. Providing necessary and unrestricted funding for organizations and programs such as the MRC would be a step in the right direction for a city and community to practice true 2-way integration.

And it is important to note that community organizations such as MRC can provide much needed employment and job development support without having the barriers, limits and strict guidelines of the resettlement agencies. Indeed, MRC already (with their current limited resources) does provide some forms of job development. It offers some classes on computer skills, online job searching, and helps with degree certification as well. These services are needed and local agencies, as noted above, are usually so overwhelmed with high caseworker to client ratios that they are not able to

spend a lot of time and attention on these matters with clients individually. Local agencies would continue in their role then to provide refugees with help in securing "survival jobs", still a necessary and important part of the process for many. But the support from MRC and agencies like it around the country should not be undervalued or underestimated. As the Iraqi with the chemistry degree noted:

> The MRC, they had just started up and they didn't have many people, and they have volunteers that are friendly and lovely, talking in a nice way and showing you many things. Man, they were like my angels. At least there was someone to talk to, someone to show you how to use a Google map, someone to talk to you about the culture, someone to give you some direction, someone to give you some help, someone to show you how to apply for a job online. (Respondent 20)

What is most important about this quote is that MRC was able to fill a gap in this individual's resettlement experience as they were able to assist him in not only taking a step closer to gaining self-sufficiency but also in playing a role in this individual's integration into the community by aiding him in reaching his goals and thus in meeting his own expectations.

Despite both the roles of the MRC and the local resettlement agencies in securing refugees' jobs and helping them to "achieve" self-sufficiency, there were other barriers (aside from high expectations) for Iraqi refugees and resettlement agencies alike in securing employment. Culturally, there were a number of positions that many observant Muslim refugees could not accept due to the rules of Islam. One such example comes from when I was working as an employment specialist at RST. I was working with a young Iraqi man who was very motivated to learn English and to secure a job. One of the

jobs for which I helped him apply was as a bagger at a major chain grocery store in Austin. We filled out the initial application, we were called in for a first interview and then a second. After the second interview, they notified him that they wanted to offer him the job. We were both excited that he had (after months of searching) finally secured a full-time job. The next day I received a call from him saying that he could not accept the job because he realized that it would require him to potentially handle alcohol when bagging the groceries. He stated his religious views prevented him from accepting the position because of that issue. Thankfully, the US refugee program does not force refugees to accept jobs that go against their religious views. This is another aspect that had to be considered, however, with some Muslim refugee clients (Iraqi or others) that could potentially make finding a job all the more challenging.

Some Muslim Iraqi refugees considered their religion and/or their background to be a possible barrier to finding a job in the US in other ways. When asked about being Iraqi and Muslim in the US as a refugee, many Iraqis stated that they didn't think it made a difference, especially in Austin. There was a general sense that Austin, as a city, was more "open-minded" than other places, especially Dallas. A few of the respondents noted that they had heard numerous stories of discrimination in Dallas. Others noted that they expected that kind of discrimination here in the US before they arrived but were pleasantly surprised that they didn't actually experience it here in Austin anyway. As one man stated:

> I was expecting [before coming to the US] the worse before the good. I was afraid people would say what is that Middle Eastern guy doing here? What is

> that Arab guy doing here? What is that Muslim guy doing here? Is he setting up some Al Qaeda cell or something? But I found a totally different thing; people don't care who you are, especially in Austin, as long as you follow the code, as long as you're not doing anything to harm them, they don't care who you are. I love Austin.
>
> Especially in Austin? Is it different in other places? Yes, in Dallas. I know Iraqis who moved to Dallas and they were suffering because of the conservative people and discrimination. I have a friend, his name is Assad, he still lives here, and he went to an interview to work as a cashier at Target. The guy who was interviewing him, said, "where are you from?" He said, "I'm from Iraq." The guy stood up and he was toweling his sweat, he was scared of Assad, and Assad said hey, I'm not carrying any bomb on me, I'm just from there, if you don't want to give me a job, others will give me a job. (Respondent 6)

Another respondent also pointed out his perceived differences between Austin and Dallas when he said:

> Austin is the most liberal city and it is mixed from everywhere and the university is there with thousands of students. I wouldn't feel as comfortable in Dallas. Why? It's weird to explain but I cannot put it in words. I feel here in home, I feel myself. I met some rednecks there and in some cities you know and I don't like to be around that, they are close-minded. I like to live in my peaceful life. I don't want somebody to give me a different look and I don't want to be a target for somebody. (Respondent 9)

Despite many Iraqis feeling that Austin is a more open-minded locale, others still felt like they had experienced discrimination in Austin. The sense of discrimination they felt usually came to the surface when searching for employment. The Iraqi chemist gave an example:

> I was trying [to find a job] with another staffing agency and the girl there named Elizabeth, she says, do you have work authorization here? I say yes, I am working at a warehouse. She said ok, what do you think about what is happening in the Middle East? I said, what do you mean? She said what is going on in Syria and Iraq, what do you think about this? I said well, I am

> originally from Iraq. She said really? Are you citizen? I said no, I have work authorization though. She said you don't have green card? I said no, I am a refugee. She said what does that mean? I said ugh. She said that she will look if anything comes in. So at that point I am like what do they think I am? Because my name is Mohammed, I am a terrorist or what? So I don't know what's going on whenever I call these places. (Respondent 20)

While discrimination based on religion or ethnicity is impossible to prove in these situations, there was definitely a sense among some Iraqis that it was occurring, even in Austin.

Another example of this came from my field journal while working as employment specialist. When starting with RST, I was "handed" a list of Iraqi clients that I was tasked with helping to find a job. Two of these clients were a married couple without children. They were at the end of their benefits period and were in desperate need for employment. While the husband had very little education and little, if any, transferrable job experience, the wife was college educated and had previously been a teacher in Iraq. Neither spoke English well and the wife wore a hijab, the traditional Muslim head scarf. After talking to them about their situation, I told them that I would try to find them a job in a hotel, possibly housekeeping, as there were usually openings in that industry. When told this, the wife, immediately started crying. I informed them about the difficult economy and that because of their decreasing benefits, they simply needed a job. And while it did not have to be the job they had for the rest of their lives, it would at least be a start and with it they would begin to gain an employment history here in the US. When they finally agreed, I began the task of filling out applications for them

at hotels in the area. Finally, we were called in for a job interview. They would interview for a housekeeping position for her and a "houseman" position for him, basically requiring him to keep track of and deliver the necessary items to the housekeepers throughout the day. On the day of the interview, before walking into the hotel, the wife asked me if she should take off her hijab. I asked her why. She answered that she knew that some Americans did not like Muslims and she didn't want to be discriminated against. I told her that I thought that was unnecessary.

We met initially with the housekeeping manager and the interview went very well with me translating. After the interview, the housekeeping manager showed us all around the hotel, describing in detail their job descriptions and what would be required and when. The whole process went smoothly and when it was over I asked if the couple had, in fact, been selected for the position. The housekeeping manager stated that she liked the couple thought they were well-qualified, and that she would go ahead and recommend them for the position to the manager of the hotel. She stated that the manager was there that day and they would need to have a second interview with him. We met the hotel manager when we first arrived as he pointed us in the direction of the office of the housekeeping manager. After asking the housekeeping manager if it was possible to interview with the hotel manager that day since he was there and they needed to fill the positions, she went to his office to ask. When she came back she informed us that he was busy the rest of the day and that we should call back to schedule the interview with him. We left the hotel and all of us felt a sense of relief that this couple may finally have

secured a position. When I called back the next day to schedule, I was told by the housekeeping manager that the hotel manager was going on vacation and wouldn't be back for a couple of weeks and that I should call back at that point. When I called back again, she informed me that the position had been filled but that I was welcome to call back again in a couple months to see if anything else was open. When I informed the Iraqi couple of the news that job had fallen through, the wife stated that she thought she should have removed her hijab. Whether or not discrimination took place in that situation, there was certainly a sense among the Iraqi couple that, before the interview, it could and that afterwards, it did. Discrimination, although more difficult to verify as a real barrier to self-sufficiency and integration in Austin and the US is nevertheless an aspect of the overall political, cultural, societal, and institutional environment to which Iraqis were and continue to enter.

### 8.2 Refugee agency and alternative pathways to refugee integration

So far, this chapter has looked almost solely at the structural and institutional environment to which Iraqis and other refugee populations were arriving to the US in 2009 and 2010. While the various structures of the receiving community and country are certainly important factors for a refugees' successful integration into that society, it is by no means the only factor that determines their experience. Agency is also an important aspect in determining how a refugee is able to integrate and to achieve self-sufficiency in a given place. Refugees, like any other migrant and human being, are rational decision makers with the ability to forge their own path to successful resettlement and integration

given the numerous barriers and obstacles they face and which have already been discussed in this dissertation. There are then numerous ways that Iraqi refugees use either individual or group agency to define their own experiences here, regardless of the structure to which they are limited.

This section will thus look at some of the different ways that Iraqi refugees resettling to Austin in 2009 and 2010 were using (and in many cases continue to use) their own agency to map out their own paths to successful integration. These examples include: human social capital, whether it be from the larger Iraqi community or from the "native" community; mobility in terms of secondary migration from the location of original resettlement in the US, or even (as discussed earlier in the chapter) returning to Iraq; transnational relationships with family or friends in other areas of the world for financial and/or psychological support; locating other sources of support and funding in the community and more broadly the role of religious institutions and organizations in the resettlement of refugees in Austin; and finally the idea of citizenship and the importance of this concept to Iraqi refugees and how it has the ability to make them not only feel more a part of the community and nation, but how it also is perceived to give them more opportunities for employment.

### 8.2.1 Social Capital

One major difference between refugees and those referred to as "economic migrants" is that there is usually more choice for economic migrants in deciding their destination. This choice may be dictated by employment opportunities, family, friends or

possibly a combination of those things. Most refugees who are admitted to the US do not make this choice for themselves. They are often sent to a locale with no knowledge of the place, and more importantly, without knowing anyone in that place. This was the case for the Iraqi family for whom I was a community advocate through Caritas. As outlined in section 5.1.1, not only did they not know anything about Austin, TX before coming here, they knew no one here, Iraqi or otherwise. When this family arrived to Austin in 2008, there was an almost non-existent Iraqi population here and they were among the first Iraqi refugees to arrive in Austin. Thus, their only source of social capital was the refugee agency through which they resettled and myself, their community advocate. This lack of existing social support upon arrival puts many refugees at a disadvantage, especially those that do not speak English. It inhibits their ability to navigate the services, resources, opportunities, and happenings of the community in which they are resettling. It thus has the potential to not only exclude them from these features, but it also aids in keeping them invisible from the "native" population in that community.

There does seem to be a marked difference in bridging social capital between Iraqis who speak English and who came through the SIV program and those that did not. While Iraqis coming through the Special Immigrant Visa program usually, like Iraqi refugees, had their travel purchased for them with the help of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and upon arrival received the same benefits as refugees, many of them had more "choice" in their destination in the US. Iraqi SIV's

were able to go to a location if they had an American "sponsor" in that locale. Therefore, many Iraqis who were already working with numerous Americans in Iraq were, while still somewhat limited, able to choose their location in the US based on the Americans they knew and that were willing to put their names down as potential sponsors. Most of the SIV's therefore that arrived in Austin and that I worked with at RST had a connection with an American citizen before arrival. Sometimes this connection was stronger than others but regardless, as the interviews show, having that relationship (which was oftentimes a very strong friendship) was integral in allowing Iraqis to feel more at home and, indeed, more integrated in the society, even at such an early stage. As one Iraqi SIV puts it, he chose to come to Austin based on the advice of one of the Majors that he worked with in Iraq, Major Davis. When asked why/how he had come to Austin over other destinations in the US where he had some family or where there were more Iraqis, he said:

> The reason is, I mean, a lot of my family here in the US have been here like a short time. I was thinking they're not going to be able to help me with nothing. I'm sure they would do, but its not like they were raised here, so I had one of my friends, one of the officers from one of the units I worked with, Major Davis, he's one of my best friends, he lives here in Round Rock. And you know to go somewhere you've never been before; you gotta ask the people that lives in there. So I was asking like all the soldiers I was working with in my unit, like what's the best place to go in the US? So a lot of them were recommending Texas because they said you can find a lot of job opportunities here and beside that, just comparing to the economy and the living and prices so its [Texas] cheaper than a lot places like California and Florida. And Maj. Davis said if you come to Austin, you will only be about 20 minutes away from where I live and I will be able to help you and touch base with you like every other day so you will be fine I'm sure. So we decided to come here to Austin. He recommended it and I came here and well, you know to go to somewhere where you don't have family around.

> You know what it feels like to be homesick right? I miss my family and I miss my country but here I feel like I'm at home. Seriously because, the friends I have here. I have friends in every state in the US. A lot have come to visit me. They touch base with me every so often, maybe every week, every other week, by saying how are you doing, how is the family, do you need anything? So, that makes me feel like I am home, so I don't feel like I am away from my family. So I think here was the right place to come and I am happy here seriously. I think I chose the best place to come. (Respondent 4)

The importance of having a connection to the "native" community in this quote cannot be overlooked. Indeed, because this man's family had only been in the US for a "short time" he chose to go where he had an American friend who could help him navigate his new life. This shows the importance of social capital outside one's national or ethnic community. For this man, "native" social capital, knowing someone that was "raised here" was paramount and instrumental in helping him "feel at home", an integral part of successful integration. In this regard, this individual, similar to many other Iraqis coming through the SIV program, used their own agency as a way to immediately connect with Americans in the communities where they would be arriving and thus to help them in becoming and feeling a part of those communities.

While numerous other Iraqis throughout the interviews stressed the importance of having American friends and knowing American people as positive and beneficial factors in their resettlement experience, many of those same respondents noted that the Iraqi community in Austin was neither as important nor as desired for material, financial, or psychological support upon arrival. Despite much past research on immigrant and refugee integration and the purported importance of existing ethnic communities in that

integration, much of the data from the interviews from this study runs counter to the idea that present national and/or ethnic groups are helpful or even desired by the incoming Iraqi individuals and families. This idea is largely supported by both the refugees and the service providers interviewed. One proposition for this is that, as the previous quote highlights, Iraqis simply do not desire help from other Iraqis in navigating the resettlement experience. Except for locales like Detroit and San Diego, there are not large and well-established Iraqi communities in many of the resettlement cities in the US which could even aid in the integration of newly arrived Iraqi refugees. Another possible reason, however, may have to do with the context of war, violence, and sectarian animosity from which many Iraqis are coming. Indeed, many of the respondents, when asked about how they thought the war in Iraq has affected them, they brought up points not only having to do with sectarian tensions, but also the ways in which they perceive certain characteristics of Iraqi culture have affected their resettlement here and for which they are uninterested in mingling with the existing Arab and Iraqi communities.

During one interview, when asked if he had thought about the Iraqi community that would be in Austin before arrival, one of the Iraqi respondents stated:

> I was thinking not to be close to the Iraqi community here because I had enough back there. I didn't know Austin had a big Iraqi community. When I came here, I said wow, there are a lot of Iraqis. But actually there is no communication between me and them except with the group I know. And also, the group I know, they don't like to communicate too [with other Iraqis]. So we are kind of a close group.
>
> Why didn't you want to communicate with the Iraqis? Because Iraqi people make a lot of troubles. They are big mouth, they talk a lot. This is what we

> don't like. We don't like people to talk behind us. It's a shame to say it but it's the truth.
>
> Is the Iraqi community here close in your opinion, are they helping each other? Some of them they do yeah. But every single Iraqi, he has a very close friend and he is an enemy for a lot of people. Every single Iraqi, like this is the Iraqi way. It's like they say, I like to have somebody close to me and then I'm not gonna like anybody else. Even the families. Its like this family likes this family but they hate this family and they don't talk to this family and they talk bad about this family, you know, this happens a lot. (Respondent 9)

This is actually one of many examples from the interviews of Iraqi refugees generally not wanting to associate, or at least, be assisted by the larger Iraqi community in the resettlement process or in the longer-term process of integrating into American society. Another respondent, when talking about how the violence in Iraq has potentially affected the Iraqi community here in the US, he said, "there is still no trust between the sects…the [sectarian] divide exists here but people try to keep it down a little bit because they are afraid, here there is law, but it exists."[19]

For Iraqis who came to the US because of their relationship with the US military as translators or other employees, they were, as noted earlier, in extremely precarious positions inside of Iraq and as one Iraqi put it, "you couldn't even trust your friends and your neighbors that you have lived next to for years." Working with the American military or contractors during the war is not the only reason for secrecy, however. Living under an authoritarian dictatorship for most of their lives, some Iraqis pointed to this

[19] It should be noted here that Lindholm discusses low corporate identity and resistance to authority as aspects of Middle Eastern culture which could help to explain, among various other factors, the reluctance of Iraqis to form community associations or organizations (Lindholm 2002).

aspect as a reason that many Iraqis do not trust each other, confide in each other, and therefore assist each other even in their new lives. As another respondent noted when asked about the sense of community among Iraqis in Austin:

> No, there isn't a sense of community here. To be honest, people here, especially the Iraqis, because of what happened in Iraq, Iraqis don't have that sense of being close to other Iraqis. That trust was broken back in the 90's. Even before 2003. Because Saddam played it really well. He was like, you cannot speak against him or against his regime in your own room, even in your own bedroom you cannot speak. We were always saying there, "the walls have ears", so don't say anything. So we don't trust nobody there and that grows up inside of us. (Respondent 6)

This is a powerful statement. It shows first, that it was not only the current war in Iraq and the often covered sectarian violence that is a cause of increased tension and lack of trust among Iraqis, but also the longstanding effects of the political structure and repression in the everyday lives of Iraqis by the government. It also shows how that is able to be carried over to the US and become a part of the overall experience of Iraqis in their resettlement here.

Examples of Iraqi refugees stressing their lack of desire for interacting with and building their social capital among other Iraqis here in Austin are salient. Moreover, it spans the range of backgrounds of Iraqis here. In other words, it was not just Iraqis that came here with knowledge of English and other forms of cultural capital who may have had more confidence to find jobs and interact with the rest of the English speaking population. Iraqis who came with no English language skills and no cultural capital also stressed similar sentiments. As one Iraqi who came to Austin in 2008 stated, "I'm done

with Iraqis. I hate them, all of them. I am American now" (Respondent 18). This particular individual no longer has any family in Iraq. Still harboring anger towards violence directed at his family in Iraq, this man has no desire to maintain an Iraqi identity and looks only towards his future in America, despite speaking very little English or having high prospects for social mobility here.

Yet another Iraqi individual, an English speaker, had similar sentiments, if not quite so blunt.

> When I came here I decided not to mix with other Arabs at all. Why not have contact with other Arabs in the US? We didn't know what we would feel or how people live their lives here. My wife and my brother's wife didn't want to mix with other Iraqis. We think…well, they [Iraqis] have a lot of problems. They will be friends just like that and they will have a lot of problems just like that. And the problems will continue to grow and grow without even a good reason. They will become friends because they feel lonely. And then because they don't know each other very well, they will turn on each other. And people from different backgrounds, different educations, and different cities. You can see it here, after a while, people will have some differences and the way they express their differences is a very unmodern way; they will fight, yell at each other, call each other bad names. This is what I don't like. We left all that back home. We want to start a new life and make use of what you have and what you think is good and no one can make us do anything we don't want to do. So you take your good things that you already build here and I bring my own culture, the good part of the culture, because not all the culture is good, so I bring my good part of the culture and live here but many people [other Iraqis] don't understand that. They still think that they live there but they live here, so I don't know. (Respondent 16)

What many of these quotes illustrate is that there is animosity and a marked lack of trust among the Iraqi population both overseas and here in the US. Whether that animosity is due to increased sectarian tensions after 2006, Saddam Hussein's authoritarian regime, or simply perceived or real cultural aspects among the Iraqis themselves, the consequences

of this lack of trust and animosity is the absence of a close knit and organized community working together to support each other throughout the often challenging resettlement process. As one resettlement agency staff member stated during a discussion about Iraqi refugee resettlement, "there is no cohesion. I just think they are fearful of each other and what other people know. There is no Iraqi community leader. That scares me a little. Almost all the other main arrival groups have community leaders; the Burmese, the Bhutanese. Even after years, the Iraqis don't." (Respondent 13)

While this agency employee believes the Iraqi refugee population in Austin would be better off with a community leader(s) and simply more cohesion, the fact that so many Iraqis do not desire this cohesion must be recognized. It is these types of contextual and structural factors that must be taken into account with all refugee groups arriving to the US. Furthermore, social and cultural capital are not the only ways in which refugees, Iraqi refugees in particular, use aspects of agency to "find their own way" in the American resettlement system and process. The remainder of this section will look briefly at some of the other ways that Iraqis are "depending on themselves" and not the local agencies for the necessary support to survive in the US.

**8.2.2 (Physical) Mobility**

As discussed in detail above, most refugees arriving to the US have very little say in where they will be located regardless of if they have family or friends elsewhere. Usually, only if a family has a predetermined sponsor in a location before arrival or if they have immediate family members (i.e. mother, father, spouse, or children) there will

they be able to be sent to that place. Extended family members, however, including sisters, brothers, aunts, and uncles will rarely have bearing on where a refugee is sent. This can pose difficulties and much frustration for refugees and agencies alike as oftentimes, newly arrived refugees will want to relocate to another city or state where they have extended family, often their only form of social capital in the US. US refugee policy and funding guidelines discourage and often prohibit this post-arrival relocation from happening. This is often discouraged because refugees who relocate after arrival will lose much of their financial, material, and other forms of important support from the local agencies.

As stated above, before an individual or family arrives to the US, their assurance is sent to the local agency who then begins to use *that individual's* funds in the resettlement process, i.e. finding and paying the deposit on an apartment, furnishing that apartment, paying deposit for electricity account, etc. If a refugee decides to leave after they arrive then, all that money is lost. Moreover, if an individual decides to leave, he is able to have the remainder of his USRP funding dispersed to him but will not be able to sign up for the extended financial programs which help to pay for rent, bills, etc. Further, he will not be able to receive these benefits in the locale where he chooses to resettle. Nor will he receive the same crucial support from the refugee agency in that place (if there is one at all) in terms of finding an apartment, furnishing that apartment, etc. Put simply, he will basically be truly on his own and will rely solely on the help of his family or friends in that place. If there is a resettlement agency there, he may be able to receive

help in accessing social services such as food stamps and Medicaid, although all states have different rules regarding these benefits.

What are the consequences of these program guidelines? For many refugees, especially those who feel particularly vulnerable in the US, it inhibits them from rejoining family members and friends who may be able to offer them not only much needed psychological support, but possibly financial support as well. One example of this I observed as a community advocate for an Iraqi refugee family that arrived to Austin in 2008. Their "story" is discussed in section 5.1.1, but for the purposes of this section it is important to point out that this family, none of whom spoke English and who knew no one in Austin when they arrived in 2008, had family who had arrived only months before to Phoenix, AZ and to Boise, Idaho. The family that arrived here in Texas, has considered moving to Arizona numerous times but is afraid of finding jobs there, continuing the benefits of the elderly parents, and generally, starting life all over again, but without the help of a local agency or a community advocate volunteer. Meanwhile both families have spent precious financial resources to "reunite" after long separation. As another Iraqi refugee put it when asked if he and his family ever considered moving to another state where he had extended family members, "No, its going to be like another immigration thing. Like, if I go somewhere else in the states it will be like starting over again. The whole process, same thing, is going to be like ohhhh, like going from Iraq to Austin. So if I go from Austin somewhere it will be like leaving Iraq and going to Austin again."

Acknowledging that there is a reason for the dispersal policies of the US Reception and Placement program, there should be more of an effort made to take family (including extended) into account when finding locales for the placement of refugees. In doing this, there would be less frustration on the part of many refugees, but also on already overwhelmed agency staff who are often tasked with trying to help newly arriving refugees who have come unannounced from other cities and states.

### 8.2.3 Transnational Communication

One of the outcomes of the Iraqi refugee crisis and the previous outflow of Iraqi refugees in the 1990's has been the creation of an Iraqi diaspora, especially among minority ethnicities in Iraq, namely the Kurdish community and the Iraqi Christian community. Diasporas are forming for majority Arab Sunni and Shi'a Iraqis, however, as an outcome of the sectarian tensions that many have faced in Iraq since 2006. Regardless, many Iraqi families arriving to the US and to Austin, TX have extended family dispersed throughout the globe. The family for which I was a community advocate, for example, currently has family in Syria, Sweden, the Netherlands, Australia and then within the US in Arizona and in Idaho. Distance no longer poses a barrier, however, due to internet technology. One of the first things the family sought out once in Austin was a computer and a high speed internet connection. This gave them instant access to their family members throughout the world (who they communicate with on a weekly basis) and to Arabic media. This technology allows them to connect not only with family, but also with their Iraqi and Arab identity even if they do not desire to

connect with Iraqis locally. Through technology, they are able to maintain a sense of who they were, who they are, and finally, to control who they wish to be and what aspects of identity are important to preserve. Additionally, the interview data supported the point that not only do many Iraqis coming here have relatives in various other parts of the world, but that they are in constant contact with them as well for both emotional and financial support.

#### 8.2.4 Role of religious institutions

Religious organizations and institutions have long played a vital role in the resettlement and integration of refugees in the US. As stated above, with large organizations such as Episcopal Migration Ministries and Church World Servive working in tandem with the Department of State and the Department of Health and Human Services, they are an instrumental part of the reception and placement process in this country. Churches, Mosques and Temples also play an important role at the local level. Church and/or Mosque groups often work in coordination (voluntarily) with local resettlement agencies to help in welcoming newly arrived refugees to a community. They also frequently help with providing the agency with volunteers as well as financial and material support in the form of furniture for apartments, help with transporting refugees to the various initial appointments they have, and more broadly, in offering someone to talk to and to do something as simple as take a newly arrived individual to the grocery store for the first time.

While all these examples are handled through the relationship with the local agency, refugees themselves often seek out support from religious organizations on their own once their assistance from the agency has ended. While working at RST, there were many instances when refugees would seek out support on their own from various religious groups. These instances would often be brought to the attention of agency staff as those groups would often call the agency to verify that a specific family or individual had indeed run through the benefits available from the agency. This occurred quite often and there were many times when the churches and or mosques that were approached by refugees did not have the resources to assist them. It also points to the need for better developed and better funded long term assistance programs.

**8.2.5 Citizenship**

Lastly, I want to briefly discuss the idea of citizenship and what it means to Iraqi refugees arriving to the US. While not really an aspect of agency, citizenship is perceived by many Iraqis to be a pathway to more and better opportunities in America in the future. There is a sense among many Iraqis that while they are potentially not being discriminated against because of their nationality or ethnicity, they are possibly being discriminated against for their "foreignness" and for their label as refugee or even permanent resident, rather than citizen. As one respondent put it when asked about his long-term goals in the US:

> I want to get my citizenship first. Yes, getting my citizenship is important because I'll be able to do a lot of things, I will be able to tell I am a part of this country…I want to feel like, like I'm like a part of this country.

> Do you feel like you are a part of this country now? I feel it but not 100% to when I get my citizenship and then I have dreams; I want to buy a house, I want to settle down. I want my wife to learn English and have a life similar to her old life. But she is busy taking care of our daughter at home. I want my daughter to get a good education. One of the things to help do all that is to get citizenship, and then you will get more opportunities for jobs. If I got citizenship I'm sure I'll be able to make more money from any job I want to do. And not to be known only as an immigrant or refugee so I'm sure if I got citizenship, which is one of my main goals, my life is going to be much easier. I mean, I never was described as an American or a refugee here from anyone, never, but I don't want to end up in that situation to have been called, like you're not American or something. Its just like, for that term, I mean, I know I'm not American but its kind of like keeping you away from things you are trying to reach. Like whatever, like jobs or whatever. So its like you are losing your chances pretty much, or like decreasing your chances. So, you know, I'm thinking the opposite way. I want to increase my chances in my life and to improve my life and my family's life. (Respondent 4)

This passage shows that, for this individual, he does not feel fully "settled" in the US until he and his family have acquired their citizenship. For him then, citizenship is a key aspect of true integration, of feeling and becoming a part of this community and, as he perceives, in helping him achieve his long-term goals and dreams. There is a direct connection for him between having citizenship and a true sense of belonging. Another individual, the one who is searching for the chemistry job, when asked about his goals in the US speaks in similar terms about the idea of citizenship:

> Man, I want to start my life here. I don't want to go back to Iraq. Maybe go back to visit, but not to live. But, here, goals, find a better job, try to get a masters degree, find a chemist job, find a wife, get the kids. I will be citizen after 5 yrs. That is just a time issue. All refugees will be citizen after 5 years so I don't need to think about it.
> You think life will change at all once you are a citizen? Yeah, I think yeah. I give you an example. When you look on the website for chemist job, some companies say US citizen only. I don't know why. I think it's just because of chemistry. And if you are an American citizen, you can travel all around

> the world and get a job in Europe because you are an American. As an Iraqi they say, why is *he* coming here? That is one of the difficulties. So when you are a citizen you get more benefits. Even here in America there will be more benefits when you say I am a citizen. When you apply for a job, you are a citizen, you are not an immigrant, you don't have a green card, no, you are a citizen. So that's a good thing. And that's what I am trying to do. Whatever I try, it's to be a part of this community…I feel in between Iraqis and Americans. Still need more time to be more American. But then I think about going back to Iraq, and I'm like no way, I feel like more from the west than the from the east now. I think I'm changing but not really changing because I'm not involved in this community too much. But I'm getting too used to the life here, to go back to Iraq. (Respondent 20)

For this respondent, citizenship is a major pathway to having more of a sense of freedom in employment and in physical mobility. He sees it as improving his chances in employment and in the way people view you but also in simply becoming more a part of the community. More importantly, this respondent is undergoing a transition in his own perceptions of his identity. "I feel in between Iraqis and Americans", he states, with the hope that citizenship will usher him into a new phase of belonging in the US, without fully compromising the cultural values and background of his "former" life. This is a good example of the delicate balance of identity and ethnicity for international refugees and immigrants alike. It is incremental, uneven, and for Iraqis, who do not have a cohesive community of support, difficult to negotiate the borders and boundaries of identity maintenance and potential transition.

It should be noted that not all Iraqis felt that citizenship was a crucial aspect in successfully integrating into society here. While citizenship is always seen as a positive (at least in the interviews I conducted), it can also be seen as not making much difference

in one's life chances. Here is how one non-English speaking refugee regarded the idea of gaining American citizenship when asked about her goals:

> We don't really have any main goals right now, we are just trying to catch up with life, and to live our life. If we are able to get citizenship here, we would respect that.
>
> Is citizenship important?? Citizenship is important and would be nice, but the main thing is feeling settled down somewhere. We still don't know if we can stay here, or if we will have to go somewhere else. (Respondent 23)

This individual's experience with resettlement is markedly different than those above. She and her family are simply struggling to *survive* here and thus they are still trying to "catch up with life". Citizenship is, at this time, not one of their main concerns. It is unfortunate that for her, and for many other refugees, Iraqi and otherwise, there is not the necessary support, funding, and assistance to help her in simply catching up with life and settling in the United States. Regardless of one's experience here in the US, citizenship is a fundamental concept in shaping one's identity, future, and perception about their place and role in the US and their local community.

### 8.3 CONCLUSION

Despite barriers to resettlement and successful integration due in large part to the current policies and programs that make up the US resettlement system, there was among the respondents for this study an awareness of the need and usefulness of local resettlement agencies. Even for some Iraqis who came under the SIV program, spoke fluent English, and had a framework for cultural and societal "norms" in the US, many admit that they could not have made it in this country without the local agencies

assistance. As one Iraqi SIV noted, "without the resettlement agencies here in the states, nobody, no no, 90% of the refugees cannot make it. For myself, I cannot make it. OK, I got the visa, I came to the states…OK, I arrive here, at the Austin airport. Now where am I going to go? What am I going to do? Unless you have a very close friend. OK, I have a close friend but how many days is he going to accept me in his house?" And despite serious complaints about his own resettlement experience with the local agency, he still notes here the crucial role they play in his post-arrival experience. Another Iraqi SIV stated, "Without RST we would be lost the first 2 or 3 months. They walk us half of the way to be settled down in US before even we get here. They found housing, everything for us. Everything else depends on you, who you are. (Respondent 7)" This man, while noting the important role RST played in his own experience, also has a keen sense of the fact that agencies role only goes so far. The rest, as he states, "depends on you".

While one of the agency directors interviewed for this study described the US resettlement system as "broken", she nevertheless stated that it needs to exist and moreover, that it should continue to resettle at least the same number of refugees annually that it currently does. Later in the interview she describes the current system as a "puzzle" in which the pieces are strewn about and each city "has its pieces to make the puzzle whole but you just need the time and resources to put the puzzle together." What then is the role of the local resettlement agencies in this puzzle and more importantly, what *should* its role be? Currently, local agencies in most cities are one of, if not the, only organization serving their respective refugee communities. However, these agencies

are funded and set up on a model that does not allow for them to play these multiple roles. The agencies role, as long as these organizations are funded almost solely through government funding, should be in offering the basic necessities and services to refugees arriving in their communities. To do more, they would require more funding and more resources to have the ability to provide any additional services.

A more efficient and effective model then would be based upon the idea presented in the discussion on integration; that integration is a two way process which not only requires the incoming population(s) to adjust and be open-minded to the "norms" of the receiving society, but at the same time, for the receiving society to welcome and actively participate in the resettlement of the arriving population. For this to happen, not only do local resettlement agencies need to exist as part of the puzzle of integration, but organizations such as the MRC, ethnic community organizations, and other service providers need to exist as well. Sufficient translation services (for all community non profit agencies) and services to help in degree certification for educated refugees would be an attainable first step in allowing Iraqis and refugees from all different backgrounds and contexts meet their own expectations in the US and thus to integrate and to become "a part of their communities".

# Chapter 9: Discussion and Conclusion

This dissertation attempts to trace the "story" of the Iraqi refugee crisis and give voice to some of the victims of that crisis. Additionally, through those voices and 16 months of participant observation at a local resettlement agency, it attempts to gain a better understanding of and provide a critical reflection on the state policies and programs which not only helped to bring Iraqi refugees to the US but those policies that helped shape the early experiences of resettlement and integration for Iraqis here. Being a vague term, integration in this study is defined as a two-way process that requires the open-mindedness and adaptation of both the refugee and the receiving communities. Integration is also viewed in this study as a process which is long term and one in which refugees eventually gain the ability to participate in all sectors of the host society. Through the research, I found that everyday state policies can, in various ways, exclude refugees from becoming a part of and thus participating in many aspects of society in Austin. Aside from the structural barriers of specific policies, however, cultural and societal differences can pose a challenge as well. Regardless of religion, Iraqis come to the US with deep-rooted and embedded cultural values and various ideological strictures which can often play a role in the way they are (un)able to interact and participate in the receiving society, culture, and politics.

Iraqi refugees came to the US through two separate programs made available by the US government. Most of these Iraqis came through the typical refugee channels,

which occur in cooperation with various state and international actors such as the UNHCR, IOM, VolAgs, and the US Department of State's Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration. These organizations and actors take part in the often lengthy and highly controlled process of third country refugee resettlement. The remainder of the Iraqis who came to the US since 2007 came through a unique program called the Special Immigrant Visa program. To be eligible for this program, Iraqis had to have worked for the US armed forces or an American contractor in Iraq and after completing an extensive application process, were able to be admitted to the US straight from Baghdad or other locales inside or outside of Iraq. The Special Immigrant Visa program is especially unique because Iraqis coming through this program, although they receive the same benefits as refugees, are able to apply and travel to the US without crossing international borders and are therefore not officially considered refugees. It should be noted that many Iraqis that worked for the US military and US contractors also came officially as refugees to the US through a Priority 2 program, which brought them here through the same channels as other Iraqis who did not work for the US.

Iraqi refugees coming to the US, whether through typical channels or the SIV program, come from a vast range of backgrounds. Many of the Iraqis I spoke with in the interviews and worked with at the resettlement agency, for example, were highly educated, fluent in English, and possessed vast work experience and expertise. Other Iraqis interviewed, however, had lower levels of education, no knowledge of English, and little to no transferrable work experience. While integration is often measured by

practical factors such as employment, housing, education, and language, it must also be measured by how refugees *feel* about the degree to which they are included in the social, cultural, economic, and eventually political fabric of the host society. Because of the vast range of backgrounds, experiences, and skill sets of the Iraqis interviewed for this study, there were differing views on how respondents felt in terms of being a part of or being disconnected from society in Austin. Some Iraqis, especially those coming through the SIV program, not only had knowledge of English, but many also had a sponsor here in the US, someone from this area, who had agreed to help them in their resettlement experience. Iraqis who had these built in connections in the native community and who additionally spoke English, noted a real sense of feeling at home in the US, and in Austin. Iraqis coming as SIV's also had more choice in their final destination in the US, which was a factor in having an overall sense of preparation and a general understanding for where they would be and what to expect. Having worked with, spoken to, and dealt with many Americans in Iraq, Iraqis that came to the US through the SIV program often had a sort of cultural capital that some others do not. These previous learnings and connections help them immensely in feeling both a sense of security, comfort, and belonging once in the US.

This is in direct contrast to many Iraqis (the majority in fact) that come here with little to no social capital, no (or very little) knowledge of English or of any aspects of American society, and others yet with little education. Without language and without any bridging social capital (other than the overwhelmed local resettlement agency) to help

navigate the daily and complex challenges of resettlement, many Iraqi refugees feel a sense of being "between here and there", of not being settled, and a sense of frustration in the barriers that stand before them in keeping them from fulfilling their expectations and often a general sense of disillusionment in their futures. Almost all Iraqi refugees talk about a sense of appreciation for their relative physical safety in the US, and most have extremely high hopes and expectations for life in this country. Upon confronting the structural barriers that exist in the US, however, some Iraqis become so overwhelmed and hopeless that they actually travel back to the Middle East where they believe they have more hope and a better chance of survival.

No matter what program Iraqis came to the US through, and no matter their skills and background, social policies for refugees in the US can exacerbate already existing difficulties and barriers for many Iraqis and can in turn create a sense of exclusion from becoming fully integrated in the US. The programs designed to help refugees integrate, achieve self-sufficiency, and to generally succeed in the long-term in the US are based upon a model of short-term and immediate results and outcomes. Very little time or attention is given to refugees by resettlement agencies or by the programs that they are tasked with initiating and implementing. Financial benefits programs last for 3-8 months for newly arrived refugees by which point they are expected to be "on their own" and hopefully self-sufficient. Self-sufficiency is determined at 90 days after arrival and dictates that refugees are at that point able to cover all their expenses without government assistance. To do this, refugees in the US are expected (required in fact) to accept the

first job that is offered to them, no matter their prior educational, technical, linguistic, or vocational background. This fact is very difficult for many Iraqis, of all backgrounds, to accept and agree to. For those that do not speak English (in itself a huge barrier to integration in a new country), the programs, requirements, and funding developed and provided by the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement for the acquisition of language for newly arrived refugees seems to be more of an afterthought than anything. The programs are underfunded, too short, and do not (i.e. are not able) offer the long term intensive language courses most refugees need to really begin to acquire it. Moreover, most refugees, who are required to be employed at 90 days, are not able to spend the necessary time attending classes or formally studying the language. The current thinking in US refugee policy is that immediate entrance into the workforce will help non-English speaking refugees learn the language, but when survival jobs include vocations such as hotel, warehouse, and factory work, most refugees are entering into vocations where many of their co-workers are non-English speaking as well.

All of these programs and processes are based on an American neoliberal do-it-yourself model that few refugees understand or thrive upon, and that most struggle with and find extremely difficult to overcome given their many disadvantages. The public-private partnership framework of the US Reception and Placement program is great in theory. As the data points out, however, through interviews with service providers, there is very little direction, involvement, or help in developing the private side of this partnership. Having some direction on this would help to improve relations with the

federal partners and would hopefully have the effect of improving the entire resettlement program and thus the individual experiences for refugees. Additionally, one problem with refugee resettlement in the US, which exacerbates the challenges service providers face in expanding private partnerships, is the fact that very few people in the US know about refugee issues and about refugee resettlement in America and, indeed, in their own communities. There is, among many service providers and staff working in refugee resettlement, a sense that refugees are "invisible" in the US and that too often they seem to be hidden from the view of the general public. While local stories about refugee resettlement at the city and community scale abound, there is very little being done on a national scale, either by the federal government or the national voluntary agencies to make refugees coming to the US a more visible issue. Making refugee resettlement, refugees, and generally, refugee issues in the United States more visible through awareness and education could potentially help in gaining more financial, material, and human resources from private partnerships, rather than simply public ones.

Reliance primarily on public sources of funding inhibits local refugee resettlement agencies and individual refugees alike. Because of strict guidelines, restrictions, and the need for sometimes unrealistic measurable outcomes, government funded programs, while still playing an important role can severely limit the flexibility of agencies to work with the unique challenges and backgrounds of each individual refugee. The fact of the matter is that not all refugee groups are alike and for sure, within a single group, each individual is very different. Every refugee arrives not only with their own set of hopes,

dreams and expectations, but also their own unique set of challenges and obstacles, whether they be health related, educational, linguistic, or psychological. Local resettlement agencies and their staff need to be able to not only spend more time individually with each newly arrived refugee as it is a crucial period in their overall long-term process of integration, but agencies also need to be flexible. They need to be flexible and available for refugees in their first days, weeks, and possibly even months of starting their new lives in the US.

Currently, the role of many of the local resettlement agencies is more like that of a governmental arm distributing limited benefits and information to refugees in a rushed in-and-out model based on short-term outcomes. While these services are a necessary function, the local resettlement agency is, at the same time, one of the only means of social capital that many newly arrived refugees have upon arrival to the US. Many look to the agency to offer much more than a check, furniture for their apartment, and a bus orientation. Some look for, or at least hope for, a more welcoming environment which includes not only the time intensive process of navigating all the intricacies of forming a new life in a new society, but also long-term support and, of course, friendship. Most of the time, unfortunately, local agencies are not able to provide these features.

Austin has only a couple models that are providing these types of services to refugees although they need much more. The first example comes from the Multi-Cultural Refugee Coalition (MRC) which provides the time and long term community driven support that many refugees need. Another program is the "community advocate"

program at the local agency Caritas in Austin in which an individual from the community volunteers to help a single newly arrived family in navigating life here for their first few months. This program, while in need of many more volunteers, is well-developed and provides refugees not only with much needed and immediate social capital, but, more importantly with long-term friendship and guidance. Programs such as this should be much more visible and should abound in every community. Moreover, organizations such as the MRC should be better funded by either federal, state, or city dollars. Additional funding would allow them and other organizations like it to do more and to stay open longer giving them the ability to offer crucial long term support and community resources to more refugees for a longer period of time.

Social policy for refugees should also make it easier for them to move from one place to another without the fear of losing some of their financial, material, and social support. As discussed earlier in the dissertation, many refugees that come to the US do not have a choice in where they will resettle despite having family and other social support networks in other cities or areas of the country. Because newly arrived refugees can potentially lose much of their funding and agency support if they move to another state, it often keeps them from reuniting with friends and/or family members who would be able to offer crucial social and emotional support and assistance in the short and long-term resettlement process.

Is the current resettlement and political paradigm adequate for the Iraqi refugee experience? In various examples gathered through the interview data and through my

participant observation of working with Iraqi refugees, the answer would be no. And it is not simply the structural policies and procedures that are the cause of this, although certainly, as I have argued, they play a large role. Culture, however, needs to be taken into account. One of the themes to emerge from the interviews was that the Iraqis themselves felt somewhat "misunderstood" by the staff at the resettlement agencies. "Caritas and RST have such a hard time with Iraqis", stated one respondent. Another, for example, notes, "they (agency employees) didn't know how to deal with Iraqis". Indeed, at one of the annual Church World Service conferences I attended as resettlement coordinator for RST, there was an entire presentation for the benefit of resettlement agency caseworkers dedicated to the theme "Understanding Iraqi Refugees". In this presentation the American speaker discussed some of the issues that she (and those who helped her develop the presentation) deemed to be "unique to Iraqis". Included in these themes were: Iraqis higher than normal expectations; their deep concern with issues of trust, confidentiality, and security; health and trauma (trauma issues for Iraqis, she stated, were "fresh"); the idea that Iraqis come from an honor and shame based culture; how themes of insistence and persistence were normal in Iraqi and Arab culture ("this is the way you get things done in the Middle East", she stated) and that actually interrupting a conversation is a normal manifestation of this persistence. What is important here is not just the various points she makes about Iraqi culture, but also the fact there is a known and admitted lack of knowledge among resettlement employees in the US about Iraqis and Iraqi culture.

At the same time, many Iraqi respondents in this study admitted to their own lack of knowledge about life and culture in the US. For some, navigating and negotiating being a part of and understanding this new life and culture was exciting while for others it was quite frightening and alarming. Understanding the "new life" here and the "way people are thinking" in the US was a challenge and for some an impossibility. From the father of a family who refuses to accept an entry level job he deems to be degrading and demeaning, to a family not allowing their 20 year old daughter to work because of their cultural views relating to gender roles, to a young uneducated Iraqi man who doesn't speak English and feels so alienated in this new place that he travels back to Iraq, there are numerous embedded cultural beliefs that have the potential to further challenge the long and short term experience of resettlement in the US for Iraqis. Additionally, Iraqis, unlike many other arriving refugee groups, are extremely reluctant to form organized and cohesive community groups of support, whether for financial purposes or emotional ones.

Due to some of these cultural differences the interviews demonstrate, especially among the respondents with less knowledge of English and less transferrable employment experience, many Iraqi refugees are simply afraid. They are feeling as one respondent mentioned, "between here and there", and trying to "catch up with life" in the US. They are here in the US, ostensibly safe, but not feeling in any way a part of the cultural and societal fabric, having no one (including, in many cases the Iraqi and larger Arabic speaking community) to turn to, and being without a sense of what their future

holds. They are searching for true help, guidance, and support which is often not available to them in the current federal or local political paradigm.

What much of these factors are a reminder of is the importance of the very human and cultural aspects of refugee migration around the world and especially to the US. Karl Butzer's article, "Coming Full Circle: Learning from the Experience of Emigration and Ethnic Prejudice", reminds readers to think about a number of these aspects (2001). In this article, he traces his and his family's escape out of Nazi Germany to the United Kingdom, their forced removal from the UK to Canada, and finally his relocation to the United States as an adult. He outlines in detail the effects upon him and his family of being forced from their home in Germany and how in each new place they had to negotiate the "rules" of the new location, the prevailing attitudes of the people there, and how they were able to maintain their own sense of German-ness while also re-shaping identity in their new "home".

What is important about this article in the context of this research and this dissertation is the significance of the human experience. The emotional and psychological impact of migration, especially forced migration, is powerful. Discussing the effects of policy and the structural barriers and obstacles in a new place is certainly an important part of the overall story, but one cannot discount the very human and experiential aspects of refugee migration. While critical geopolitics and much of the political geography literature offers valuable perspectives on migration and to an extent on refugee issues, it tends to overlook much of what the very victims of forced migration

are actually experiencing on a human and cultural level. Much of the interview data from this research begins to shed light on this human experience from the perspectives of the Iraqi refugees that I had the pleasure and the opportunity to speak and work with. Hopefully, then, this dissertation offers somewhat of a "hybrid" view of Iraqi refugee resettlement and integration in the US; both discussing and taking lessons from the participant observation where I was able to gain a better understanding of how policy often constricts and restricts the Iraqi refugee experience, but also how that very human and cultural experience was dictated to me through the voices of the refugees themselves.

Integration does not simply happen through successful outcomes in the realms of practical measures such as housing and employment, but rather through a two-way process in which the host society also works hard to welcome and include refugees, eventually empowering them to become participants in the very shaping of the social, cultural, economic, and political fabric of the society and community to which they arrived. Participating in these aspects of society should not be accessible only to the second generation or to those remarkable individuals who arrived with the background, skills, education, motivation, and expertise to actively become and to *feel* a part of the receiving community. Rather, it should be made accessible to all refugees through well-developed and well-thought out programs which give them the opportunity to take part in society. More visibility for refugee issues in the US, longer-term financial support, longer lasting and more intensive English language classes, access to education for adults, more funding and incentive for community-driven long term support

organizations (like the MRC), and an easier process for degree certification for highly skilled refugees would be good first steps in allowing true integration to happen for *all* refugees.

As a dissertation research topic and because of my own personal situation, this study was limited to studying a very small part of the overall process and international system of global refugee resettlement. It thus leaves many opportunities for future research. One of these opportunities would be to compare third country resettlement models and the experiences of the refugees (or certain groups) who are connected with those models. Doing this could provide the makings of a more efficient and effective resettlement and integration program.

Another important area for future research would be in conducting a long-term research study tracking refugees through the sustained process integration and resettlement. The US Reception and Placement program expects that "most" refugees will find satisfaction eventually through the current model of rapid employment and short-term financial assistance. It would be very interesting indeed to see if this thinking is flawed. From my own observation of working with refugees for the last 5 years, I have seen many refugees languish in the same jobs without learning English, and seemingly without chance at social mobility. In the worst cases I have observed some refugees become homeless or even decide that their chances at survival are greater by returning to the conflict zones from which they originally escaped. It would be beneficial then, to

study a group of refugees over an extended period to track their experience of integration and their resulting levels of "satisfaction".

Finally, another area for further research would be to look closely at physical mobility of refugees to the US post arrival and to "track" secondary migration. Secondary migration is a big issue for refugee resettlement agencies as the comings and goings of refugees in the first days, weeks, and months after arrival can vastly impact an agency and the work that they do. It would be extremely useful to conduct a study researching secondary migration movements in the US and to gain a better understanding of why so many refugees are moving immediately after arrival and what the consequences of that movement is not only for the agencies, but for the refugees themselves.

By conducting this research, I hope in the end to not only contribute to a broader academic dialogue but, more importantly, to lay a small piece of the groundwork for creating a sensible and feasible integration framework in the United States. By having a better understanding of the experiences of refugees arriving to the US, in this case Iraqi refugees, it is my hope that this country, and the many local communities within it that serve refugee populations, can then come closer to empowering *all* refugees to become participants in the shaping of the social, cultural, economic, and political fabric of the society and community to which they arrived. Giving vulnerable and disadvantaged refugee populations this opportunity would, in my mind, not only help to make the US refugee program a true humanitarian one, but also one that is uniquely American.

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